
Report on the United States: Up to October 20, 1923. † [Selections]

by Israel Amter

A document in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 175, ll. 106-114.

The political situation in the United States is dominated by internal matters, the situation of the farmers and the persistent revolt among them against conditions being the major factor.

When Coolidge took office, he declared that he would not call a special session of Congress. He stated that the matters that would come before it were not so pressing that they could not be settled without Congress meeting. The situation of the farmers, however, has called for attention. Even though the position of the farmers, according to official reports, has improved somewhat this year — their income probably being at least \$300 million higher this year — nevertheless, they are persisting in their complaints and the threat of a Third Party grows apace. To ward off the possibility, Coolidge has taken steps to assist them. Among the remedial measures is a reduction of railway rates. This will not be an easy matter, for the railways declare that the present rates are the only means of their securing any income whatever., and that a reduction will lower the status of the railway workers.

Although the official figures indicate an improvement in the condition of the farmers, there seems every likelihood that the migration of farming population to the city will be at least 600,000 this year. Wheat has remained at about \$1 a bushel for some time, which means production at the expense of the capital of the farmer. The farmer, however, is unable to continue production in this manner for any length of time. Hence, having tried to get help from either of the existing capitalist parties, the farmers are seriously threatening to cooperate with the workers in the coming election. Ford is boomed as the possible candidate of

these elements.

Ford is a likely candidate, for he is doing everything possible to make himself acceptable, especially to the farmers. He is endeavoring to purchase Muscle Shoals, a tremendous nitrate plant in Alabama, which with the resources at his disposal would mean the production of fertilizer at low cost. Ford is now at odds with Secretary of War Weeks, who does not wish to hand over Muscle Shoals to him, realizing that it will enhance Ford's prestige. Ford Boosting Clubs are working for him in the middle west, where the farmers want a "practical" man for President. Hence the farmer question is occupying the attention of all the political parties.

The question of candidates for the coming elections is occupying considerable attention. Coolidge will depend on what happens during the next few months for obtaining the nomination. He is playing politics, trying to appease certain opposition sections of the country by appointing men of those sections to public office. He endeavored to get rid of a likely opponent by appointing him to succeed Harvey, ambassador to London. His attitude to the workers will not score many votes for him. Candidates of other parties are being mentioned, but none seems as yet to have found great favor. Debs will probably be put forward by the Socialist Party.

In the matter of the Third Party, attention has to be paid to the Federated Farmer-Labor Party (the one to which the Workers Party is affiliated), the old Farmer-Labor Party, of which [John] Fitzpatrick and [Edward] Nockels of the Chicago Federation of Labor are the heads, and the numerous state Farmer-

†- The German translation of this document in the archives (same delo, listy 115-138) is date-stamped Nov. 17, 1923.

Labor Parties which are being formed. In at least 29 states, farmer and labor elements have come together to form a new party. There seems little likelihood of these state labor parties getting together for the elections of next year. It is probable that one of them will endorse a third party candidate and the others will do likewise.

The Federated Farmer-Labor Party holds a convention in January to put up candidates. The Party is inviting all other parties, farmers' organizations, trade unions, etc. to send delegates. It is impossible to state what success we will have. The antagonism to the Communists, and the campaign against them, are likely to keep the other parties from sending delegates.

* * *

Economic Situation.

The economic situation has not improved in the past two months. On the contrary, there are signs of a decided depression occurring soon. Although these signs were not wanting before, they are becoming more pronounced. There has been a steady decline in the steel and iron production... Textile mills are working three or four days a week in New England, the center of the industry in the north. The southern mills, in South Carolina, are working full time as yet. The mills in the south are owned to a large extent by the same concerns but labor is far cheaper in the south, owing to there being utterly no organization. Hence the mill owners are running the mills that cost them least money. Automobile production has slowed down a trifle. Trade, particularly in the middle west, is declared to be "dead." Bankers openly declare their "optimism," and say a period of depression cannot begin, owing to the skillful methods that have been employed in passing through the deflation period. Unemployment is on the increase, the cost of living has not gone down, wages are somewhat reduced. There will be considerable unemployment during the winter. Conditions, however, will not be critical owing to the coming elections...

Labor Movement.

The Workers Party has been the storm center of

the whole labor movement. Although the movement against the Communists began before the convention at which the Federated Farmer-Labor Party was formed, it has assumed a most malignant form since then. Gompers has assailed the Party and the Trade Union Educational League, calling us agents of Moscow, and destroyers of the American labor movement. The attacks have been especially violent in the United Mine Workers and the International Ladies Garment Workers. The editor of the journal of the Miners published a series of articles in the *Boston Transcript* which did the government's work after the Michigan convention [the August 1922 Bridgman raid], in publishing the accounts of Burns, the head of the Department of Justice. These articles were republished in all capitalist papers, and despite their malice give the Communists a mine of advertising. The purpose of them, however, was clear. The convention of the American Federation of Labor was approaching and it was necessary to stem the tide of rebellion that is arising in the organized labor movement of the country. But the violence was so intense that we can assert that they did less harm than good. Searles, the editor of the *Miners' Journal*, used material that had been taken from the offices of the Pittsburgh District office of the Workers Party by the Department of Justice agents. Furthermore the Forward, Jewish Socialist paper of New York, has carried on a malicious campaign not only against the Communists, but also against the progressives, such as Hillman, demanding that they, and especially Hillman, take a definite stand against the Lefts. This propaganda has been to the advantage of the Party and the Trade Union Educational League.

Altogether it may be said with clarity that *only the growing strength of the Party and of militant sentiment in the United States alone are responsible for the attacks on the Communists.*

[Federated Farmer-Labor Party.]

The organization of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party (FFLP) has been a red flag to the reactionary leaders of the AF of L. Although the FFLP has not within its ranks all the organizations that sent delegates to the convention in July, there is a solid group of workers and especially of farmers, that are sticking definitely by the organization. The CEC of the Work-

ers Party, in its thesis, states that we can count on 250,000 organized workers and 50,000 to 80,000 farmers. Green, the delegate of the FFLP to the Peasants Conference here in Moscow, told the writer that the farmers will adhere to the Party (FFLP) to a man. He is most confident about the future of the party, but admits that its organizing power must come from the Communists. Thus the Workers Party has assumed a tremendous responsibility in the formation of the Party, and is showing by its mobile and flexible tactics that it will be able to keep the leadership.

The question of the policy to be applied by the CEC of the Workers Party in the development of the FFLP has been the subject of a heated discussion in the CEC. The majority of the CEC maintained that the FFLP was a bona fide organization that must be developed without any stinting of energy. The minority, consisting of Foster, Cannon, and Browder, and in part also of Ruthenberg (who did not accept the position of the minority in full) declared that the WP and also the FFLP by splitting with the Chicago group of the old Farmer-Labor Party, viz. Fitzpatrick and Nockels of the Chicago Federation of Labor, had isolated themselves from the masses. This statement is all the more peculiar in view of the fact that Foster had admitted before the CEC and publicly that the Party had achieved the victory of its life in the formation of the FFLP.

The CEC issued a thesis on the Labor Party, with which the minority disagreed. The CEC decided that the minority and each member of it would be allowed to draw up their views on the question and present them to the CI for decision. Foster did draw up a statement, which he sent to the Profintern and also to Zinoviev. To it was attached a bitter attack by Browder, who charged the majority of the CEC with using what amounts to disruptive tactics. This letter is so out of harmony with the statement of Browder in *The Worker* that one cannot understand its origin. Cannon had written a letter to the CEC, stating that as they were in New York (they had not yet moved the national office to Chicago) that they were in no position to understand the sentiment of the middle west, nor were they able to negotiate properly with Fitzpatrick and Nockels. This also is not true, since the CEC had sent comrades to Chicago to negotiate with Fitzpatrick and Nockels, and everything had seemed to be settled.

As already reported in my last, Fitzpatrick and Nockels were intimidated by Gompers, who threatened the Chicago Federation of Labor with the same fate that awaited the Seattle, Detroit, and Minneapolis central labor bodies, viz., expulsion from the AF of L if they did not desist from advocating policies that were not approved by the AF of L. As a recent letter of the CEC states, they had also threatened discontinuing payment of \$600 a month to the Chicago body, which represented the salary of Fitzpatrick.

Foster also contended that the CEC was rigid and orthodox in its application of the idea of the Labor Party, and that its actions tended to split the labor forces. He stated that the CEC accepted his idea of adopting tactics varying from place to place and thus kept the CEC from breaking up the labor forces altogether. This statement, according to a recent report of the CEC, is also not correct. The CEC points out that it had adjusted its policy to the conditions, at some places advocating the formation of a branch of the FFLP; at others advocating that the comrades enter the existing labor party and orientate it to the left and to affiliation to the FFLP; at others advocating mere propaganda for the idea of a labor party.

It has been pointed out, particularly by one of the leaders of the Farmer-Labor Party, that several of the large organizations that sent delegates to the July convention have not affiliated. This is true. Thus, the organizations of West Virginia, Buffalo, Detroit have not affiliated. It was not to be expected that, in the face of all the attacks on the FFLP and the Communists, all the organizations would join. But the CEC has adopted very flexible tactics regarding these organizations. Thus, in Buffalo, although the Executive Committee of the labor party formed there are almost exclusively Communists, the party does not advocate affiliation to the FFLP yet, but is waiting for further developments in the state of New York. The CEC had tried to get the United Front with the American Labor Party in the state of New York, but the Socialists and old Farmer-Laborites composing the American Labor Party refused. Hence a branch of the FFLP was also formed in the city of New York, and approached the American Labor Party with the idea of putting up a joint list of candidates — but even this was rejected by the American Labor Party. In West Virginia, a state Farmer-Labor Party was formed, and the Communists

are working within the organization to secure its affiliation. In Detroit a similar tactic has been employed.

From the commotion that the campaign of the FFLP has created, and the number of prominent labor leaders, local and sectional, who at first hesitated but have come over the Federated Party, it is clear that Foster's fears and contentions are false. In fact, the Party was never so well entrenched within the masses as at present. This is not to be interpreted as indicating that the Party and the Communists have a well-defined, always reliable following. There has been a vague sentiment for the slogans of the Party — for amalgamation, Labor Party, recognition of Soviet Russia, etc. The fight against the Communists due to our energetic propaganda has brought more and more organizations to an acceptance of these ideas. Fourteen state federations of labor today advocate amalgamation. Several of the smaller international unions advocate recognition of Soviet Russia and a Labor Party. One of them, the International Molders Union, which has been regarded as a conservative union, accepts all the ideas.

THIS IS ALL THE MORE SIGNIFICANT SINCE THE COMMUNISTS ARE THE ONLY ONES CARRYING ON A CAMPAIGN FOR THESE IDEAS. It is true the organizations endorsing them would deny being at all communistic. But we are taking the first steps too break down the barrage of slander and fear that has been created by capitalistic and reactionary labor leader propaganda. This augurs very well for the future.

The CEC reported that after a heated discussion on the policy of the FFLP, it was decided that a new thesis should be written. The opinion held by Ruthenberg was that Pepper's analysis of the situation in America is correct — Pepper wrote the thesis — but that not being fully conversant with the history of the American labor movement and its psychology he did not understand the slow development and changes that mark it. A new commission composed of Pepper, Foster, and Ruthenberg drew up the new thesis, which was arrived at by *unanimous* decision, and which they hoped would be adopted by the CEC with equal unanimity.

During the heated discussion in the CEC, the attitude to the membership was a united one. The

membership know nothing of the dissension in the CEC. On the other hand, the membership did not agree with the CEC policy completely. There were recalcitrant members in New York who openly spoke against the CEC policy even in open meetings. Chicago refused to hold any meeting either to criticize the behavior and action of Fitzpatrick at the July convention, or even in favor of the FFLP. They refused to propagate the affiliation of unions to the FFLP, and altogether were remiss in attempting to reach the masses with the idea of the new party. The CEC severely criticized the Chicago District Committee. It seems that the Chicago district altogether had failed to differentiate between Communist propaganda and that of the Fitzpatrick group even in the Chicago Federation of Labor. The Chicago comrades seemed to believe that as Fitzpatrick accepted all the slogans of the Communists that we had no right to criticize him. By criticism was not meant attacks, but such reminders and analyzes as would make him and his followers see that they must come over further to the left. As a consequence, when Fitzpatrick broke with us and went over completely to Gompers, the Chicago comrades were left in a peculiar position. However, their failure to act is being made up, and the Chicago district is swinging into line.

Although Ruthenberg informed me that there had been danger of a factional struggle over the FFLP, that is entirely eliminated.

[3rd Convention of the WPA.]

The CI having granted permission to the Workers Party to hold its convention before the 5th Congress, the convention will probably take place on December 30. At this convention, the policy will be decided and plans made for future work.

At the convention the question of reorganization of the Party will be taken up. At the instance of the writer, the Organization Bureau sent new plans for the organization of the party to the CEC. This meant putting the party on the shop basis and not the territorial basis that has been inherited from the Socialist Party. It will mean for America a vitalization of the work and a period of real activity within the branches. For unfortunately, the party life has been stultified by the fact that branch meetings have been

very dull, having no common object. Shop branches will completely efface this defect and give the Party the vitality necessary for Communist work.

[Membership Campaign.]

The Party's campaign for the increase of membership has been very successful. In two weeks, 29 branches were formed, having a membership of 500. There has been a good increment of English-speaking members. Many of the branches are among the miners, therefore being foreign-language branches. This is a most important addition to the forces of the Party, since the conquest of the United Mine Workers Union will be a tremendous victory for the Party and put us in a formidable position within the AF of L.

[Agricultural Work.]

The Party has started work among the farmers, beginning in the state of North Dakota, where the Non-Partisan League used to rule. We already have 100 members. We have also started a league similar to the Trade Union Educational League for work among the farmers, called the United Farmers Educational League, which is issuing a paper, which the party hopes to make a weekly as soon as funds are provided. This is a most significant decision on the part of the CEC and will help to strengthen our position in the FFLP.

[English Daily.]

The English daily cannot be issued by November 7, but the CEC states that it will be issued no later than January 1st [1924]. The sentiment for the daily is fine, and the whole Party has taken up the slogan. The Finnish Federation of the Party has pledged \$25,000 to the fund. All the other language federations are pledging a proportionate sum.

[Support for German Revolution.]

The Party is planning mass propaganda in behalf of the German Revolution. November 7 was a day devoted to the German revolution. The CEC is issuing leaflets to the railroad and port workers to induce them not to sabotage the German revolution. It

is forming "Hands Off Workers' Germany" committees and will seek a united front with the trade unions and other working class political parties on this issue.

[Pan-American Labor Conference.]

Following a recommendation from the CI, the CEC is despatching Comrade Cannon to South America and Mexico in order to organize a conference of the trade unions and political parties, cooperatives, etc. in opposition to the policies of Gompers. This is coming at a most opportune moment, since Hodges and other British labor leaders are in America, having attended the AF of L convention and intend to call a special conference of the Mexican Federation of Labor in order to line it up with Amsterdam. Gompers, being against Amsterdam, will oppose their affiliation. The Mexican and South American trade unions are not likely to accept the bait of the British labor leaders. On the contrary, there is great probability that we may line them up with the Lefts and the RILU. In any case, being thoroughly disgusted with Gompers, it should not be difficult for us to break his influence in Latin America and build up another Communist stronghold.

[Relations with Socialist Party.]

Debs has been a difficult individual to handle. He has supported Soviet Russia, amalgamation, and a Labor Party — which are ideas to which the Socialist Party is opposed. Nevertheless, Debs assailed the "borders from within," he took no stand against the SP. However, the Party has not lost patience with him. On the contrary, the Socialist Party has approved the attacks on the Communists in the trade unions. The fight is especially bitter in the International Ladies Garment Workers, from which a large number of comrades have been expelled, and a joint board (local executive committee) been suspended. Several locals in New York, Chicago, and Cleveland have been threatened with expulsion if they do not expel the members of the Trade Union Educational League — which they have almost uniformly refused to do. The CEC is seeking the influence of Debs in putting an end to this campaign of expulsion, knowing that he will either have to fight the executive of the SP or compel them

to accept his position.

[United Front.]

The CEC has gone so far in the united front campaign that it seeks a joint candidate for the Presidency with the SP, FFLP, and WP. It proposes Debs. The SP will be put in a peculiar position if it refuses a united front and joint candidate, but will nominate Debs and allow us to endorse him. Debs' position on the question will be very interesting.

[Foster Declaration of Membership.]

The CEC has decided a most important step. Up to the present Foster has denied his membership in the WP. At the time of the raids in Michigan, Foster stated that he was only a guest at the convention. The CEC thought it good policy for him to continue denying membership. However, conditions are such that the CEC has at last decided that he should come out into the open not only as a member of the Party but also of the CEC. In a statement regarding the expulsion of [William] Dunne, member of the Party, at the AF of L convention, which took place recently, Foster signed as a member of the Committee. This will naturally accentuate the situation, but at the same time, clarify it. The Trade Union Educational League will be assailed as an adjunct of the WP, but the Party is flexible and will be able to ward off these attacks.

[Armenian Affiliation.]

The Hanshack Social Democratic Federation has decided to join the Party, certain concessions being made to them so as to allow them to liquidate the prejudices that may still exist. The CEC has allowed them to continue their paper for a year, uniting it with the Party paper which was only a fortnightly. This addition to the Party is very good, since, although the Armenian population of the US is only 40,000, they are all workers.

[Young Workers League.]

The Young Workers League is doing fairly good work. The League is suffering still under the influence

of intellectualism, too large a percentage being students of colleges and high schools. Unfortunately the Party does not devote sufficient attention to the movement. The Young Comrades are very active in the unions. They have an organizer on the road, who is doing good work. The Young Workers will take a leading part in the "Hands Off Germany" campaign.

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[TUEL Conference.]

The convention of the TUEL, which took place on Sept. 1 [1923], was a great success, both politically and organizationally. It showed a remarkable strengthening of the forces supporting the TUEL and a keen understanding of the tactics necessary for carrying on the fight. Theses on all the important subjects were presented, and an elaborate report presented. The mine, railroad, and needle sections are the best organized. There is no question that the radicals have not been in so favorable a position in the United States as at present, nor have their tactics been so successful.

[Anthracite Miners' Strike.]

At the time of the convention, the anthracite miners' strike began. The 155,000 miners of Pennsylvania went out as a man and seemed determined to fight to the finish. They demanded a 20% increase, eight hour day (some of them were working 12 hours, others part time), recognition of the union and of the check-off (the system by which the workers pay their union dues by having the amount deducted from their pay, which is then handed over to the union). The leaders made a shameful compromise, without even a fight. They accepted 10% increase, and gave up the check-off. The miners accepted the compromise at a subsequent conference, but there is bitterness nonetheless. The leaders then were dined by the operators at the National Civic Club, the bankers' club of New York. The Party has taken full advantage of this traitorous act of the miner leaders. The convention of the United Mine Workers will take place in January [1924], and it will probably be very stormy. The Party is making every effort to have Communist and radical delegates sent to the convention. The union leaders are

sparing no effort to slander us in the capitalist and labor press, but each of their acts is to our advantage. As stated above, some of the new branches of the Party formed during the past month have been among the miners.

* * *

[AF of L Convention.]

The most outstanding feature of the period was the AF of L convention, which took place at the beginning of October. Communist-baiting was the main occupation of Gompers and his aides. The only Communist present, Dunne, was expelled, for being a Communist and a destroyer of the labor movement. Dunne is said to have made a brilliant speech, one "seldom heard at AF of L conventions." For once, the leaders of the AF of L were told the truth. The convention then took a most reactionary stand on all questions. Even the "progressives," who hitherto had dared to speak, hardly opened their mouths. There were only a few present, but they were unorganized — as shown in the vote for the expulsion of Dunne, he receiving the vote of only 6 delegates (of course, it must be understood that the delegates to the AF of L conventions are the international presidents, organizers, etc., so that little "progress" can be expected among them). But Fitzpatrick and Nockels of the Chicago Federation of Labor did not appear, stating that they were detained. It was obvious why they did not appear, for they knew what the issues would be and did not dare to stand up for that which they had advocated before, for they would have met the stern criticism of Gompers and would not dare openly to repudiate these principles.

In fact, only owing to the bad tactics of our comrades in Chicago and to what the CEC calls failure to carry on Communist work, the election of Fitzpatrick and Nockels to the convention took place without our comrades even attempting to put up counter-candidates or to criticize the two men. Fitzpatrick and Nockles have been shameless in their treatment of the Party and of Foster since the organization of the Federated Party, using the same methods that distinguish

Gompers. Their stand has been repudiated by the Chicago Federation of Labor without the men having lost their power, but they defeated the Communists at the convention of the Illinois Federation of Labor, to which Chicago belongs. Nevertheless, they did not dare to go to the AF of L convention and put themselves openly on record as against everything they stood for.

Hence the progressives had little standing at the AF of L convention. With violence, the convention rejected amalgamation of craft unions into industrial unions, viciously attacked Soviet Russia and rejected recognition, despite the fact that US Senators and Congressmen and businessmen are either for recognition or trade relations. The convention rejected a Labor Party, adhering to the old worn-out policy of "rewarding your friends and punishing your enemies." It stood for a bonus for the soldiers, promised to carry on a campaign for the protection of child labor, and to organize the unorganized.

The AF of L will do nothing to organize the unorganized. There are only 2,926,000 workers organized in the AF of L, this meaning a loss of 269,000 in the past year. The year before the organization lost 700,000. The loss of last year is incomprehensible, in view of the relative prosperity that has prevailed. It is due to the fear of the government which has a standing injunction against the workers, which will prevent strikes in the big industries, and to the fact that the leaders have sold out the strikes so often that the men recognize that no benefit accrues by their paying dues. There are 25 million organizable workers in the country. But the AF of L will do little to get them into the ranks. * * *

The AF of L convention was one of the worst in its history. There was not a single step forward in any direction. It was merely a heresy-hunting meeting — and the Communists have come out the victors. Gompers let it be known that the expulsion of Dunne will be followed in the international unions, the locals, and central labor bodies. * * *

Altogether the AF of L convention has done the Communist cause a great deal of good, and shown the workers that the only body of men with measures that meet the situation are the Communists.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

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