
Thesis on the Present Situation in Relation to Our Labor Party Policy, Feb. 15, 1924. †

Submitted by C.E. Ruthenberg and John Pepper

A document in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 296, ll. 43-45.

1.— The developments during the past month in relation to the political situation and our Labor Party policy have created a serious crisis in the Party. Upon the adoption of the correct policy will depend the question whether our Party will to a large extent lose the influence which it has gained through its Labor Party policy during the past year or whether we can maintain and consolidate these gains.

2.— The factors which have brought about the change in the situation are: the coming into office of the British Labour Party, the Teapot Dome Scandal, which crystallized the action of the Conference for Progressive Political Action in calling a convention on July 4th “for the purpose of taking action on the nomination of a Presidential candidate.” The effect of the two points enumerated above were clearly apparent in the atmosphere in the St. Louis Conference of the CPPA [3rd: Feb. 11-12, 1924]. Frequent references were made and resolutions adopted congratulating the British Labour Party upon its victory.

The Teapot Dome Scandal was cited over and over again as showing the utter bankruptcy of the two old political parties and even the slogan “A Workers and Farmers Government” aroused a tremendous response on the part of the delegates to this conference.

While the decision of the conference does not definitely bind the July 4th Convention to the nomination of candidates on an independent ticket, only a miracle will prevent this. The general drift of the Conference for Progressive Political Action is so strongly toward independent political action that it is unlikely that anything will happen to prevent the crystallization of this organization into a third Party at the July 4th Convention.

The discrediting of McAdoo upon whom the railroad organizations composing the conference had base their hopes has greatly accelerated this development.‡

In the Organization Committee which prepared the convention call, it was definitely stated that it was a call for the organization of a Third Party and this interpretation was only modified on the floor of the convention under pressure of a few delegates who were still not ready to make the decision.

Our policy must therefore be based upon the almost certainty that on July 4th a Third Party with independent candidates will come into the political field. This Third Party will have as its basis the million and a half organized railroad workers included in the 16 standard railroad unions, with probably additions

†- This thesis was prepared by Ruthenberg and Pepper for the February plenum of the Central Executive Committee, held in Chicago on Feb. 15-16, 1924. William Z. Foster prepared a similar document regarding Labor Party tactics and there was some effort made to combine the two documents in a subcommittee, which seems to have vetoed by Pepper, who did not see the documents as reconcilable. As a result, this thesis was voted down by a vote along straight factional lines, 8-5, and the Foster thesis approved by the same margin. The Pepper-Ruthenberg faction declared shortly thereafter that it would appeal this matter to Moscow and plans were set in motion which would send William Z. Foster (Majority), John Pepper (Minority), and M.J. Olgin (Anti-Third Party Group) to Moscow to plead their cases about six weeks later.

‡- Volition for the Conference for Progressive Political Action came from the 16 railroad brotherhoods, which seem to have envisioned a device to coordinate progressive political activity while at the same time boosting their favorite son, the Democrat McAdoo. McAdoo was embroiled in the political scandals which erupted in 1924, however, and his Presidential aspirations were derailed.

from other international organizations. It will draw in its wake millions of small business men, shopkeepers, professional groups, and well-to-do farmers, who are the followers of LaFollette. Its composition, therefore, will be a mixture of the aristocracy of labor together with petty bourgeois elements. The Gompers machine will as in the past support one of the old party tickets.

Our Situation.

1.— We were able to gain the leadership of the workers and farmers who favored independent political action during the past year and surrounded ourselves with a large group of these workers and farmers because there was no other organization which took a definite stand for independent political action through a Farmer-Labor Party. Because we voiced the demand of these workers and farmers, they were ready to accept our leadership.

We have undoubtedly influenced them to some degree ideologically but in relation to the largest part of these workers and farmers, our leadership depends upon our position as spokesman for the Farmer-Labor Party.

With the crystallization of the CPPA as an organization favoring independent political action, our position as the outstanding leaders of the movement for such independent political action becomes endangered.

2.— We cannot expect to be accepted as part of the July 4th Convention at Cleveland. The attitude of the leaders of the railroad organizations which dominate the CPPA and which, on a roll call vote based upon organizational strength will certainly dominate the Convention completely, is bitterly hostile to our Party and to the Federated [Farmer-Labor Party]. If we come to the Cleveland Convention as the Workers Party or as the Federated, it is a certainty that we will have the door slammed in our faces.

3.— It is just as certain that the organizations which thus far have been under our influence, such as the various local and state parties, will be swept along in the current leading toward the July 4th Convention and will participate in that convention and become part of the organization formed unless we are able to develop policies which will prevent this. Should

these organizations go to the July 4th Convention and become part of that organization, it means that we will lose the leadership of the movement we have created during the last year and stand isolated outside of the political party embracing the masses who are for independent political action.

This tendency toward the July 4th Convention is already evidenced in the proposal of William Mahoney of St. Paul and others of the St. Paul and Minneapolis groups, to accept the July 4th Convention call and to cooperate in the calling of that Convention. A conference is to be held on March 10th in St. Paul of all groups which participated in the November 15th conference to take action on the matter.

4.— There is only one method through which we can meet this new situation and hold for ourselves the position of leadership which we have won during the past year. This can be accomplished through a crystallization of the Farmer-Labor forces now under our influence into a definite organization before July 4th. If we can hold a convention on May 30th and there organize the groups which are now under our influence into a definite bloc and can go to the July 4th Convention as representatives of this bloc, we will be able to treat (*sic.*) with the leaders of the July 4th Convention on a different basis than if such a crystallization does not take place. As the representatives of an organized group of a half-million to a million workers, our Party cannot be ignored. It will be a powerful factor which must be considered by the leaders of the Cleveland Convention. Furthermore, such a crystallization will make more definite and secure our position in relation to the groups who will participate in the convention. If they become part of an organization with us, the likelihood of our losing our present influence is not as great, rather that influence will be strengthened.

5.— We have the basis for a strong attack on the Cleveland Convention and for a May 30th Convention in the fact that the records of the St. Louis Conference show that the leaders stated that they may endorse old party candidates or may nominate their own candidates on July 4th. For the purpose of our campaign for the May 30th Convention, we will stress this vacillation and indecisiveness. We must hold before the workers the idea that the CPPA has met three times and hesitated and vacillated and taken no steps to-

ward independent political action. We must point out to them that at Cleveland they may follow the same policy, that some person satisfactory to the railroad unions may be made the nominee of the Republican or Democratic Parties, which will mean that they will ignore the interests of all other workers and refuse to take the decisive step toward independent political action.

We have a second advantage in that the Cleveland Convention will refuse representation to local unions. We can make an appeal for rank and file representation for the May 30th Convention as against machine control by the international organizations on July 4th.

Our Policies.

In view of all the foregoing, our policies must be:

1.— We must prevent our isolation from the Farmer-Labor elements which are now under our influence; we must consolidate our influence over these groups in a definite organizational form.

2.— To accomplish this we must hold the May 30th Convention irrespective of the action of the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota, provided we can hold the support of the state organizations which have so far cooperated with us.

3.— We must launch an immediate intensified campaign against the Cleveland Convention, create doubt and suspicion in the minds of the workers as to the action which this convention will take.

4.— At the May 30th Convention we must form a definite organization, adopt a national platform, and elect a National Committee. Our policy should be, however, not to nominate candidates for President and Vice President, but to empower the National Com-

mittee elected to take action on this question according to the following situations:

(a) The National Committee is to go to the Cleveland Convention as the representative of the May 30th organization, to negotiate in regard to cooperation between the two groups. If the National Committee is seated in the convention and it nominates candidates for President and Vice President, we shall endorse those candidates, maintaining, however, our separate and distinct organization in carrying on the campaign.

(b) If the National Committee is refused admittance to the Cleveland Convention and it nominates candidates for President and Vice President, the National Committee shall immediately hold a public meeting and endorse the candidates of the Cleveland Convention and it shall carry on an independent campaign in support of those candidates.

(c) The National Committee, in case the Cleveland Committee does not form the Third Party and enter into the Presidential campaign on the basis of independent political action, shall immediately place in nomination candidates of the May 30th Convention as the Farmer-Labor candidates and carry on a campaign in support of the candidates thus nominated.

5.— We should make every effort to prevent the organizations which are under our influence and which participate in the May 30th convention from sending delegates direct from their local or state organizations to the July 4th conventions so that our National Committee may speak in the name of this bloc which is outside of the July 4th Convention together with us until such time as we are admitted to the convention.

6.— We must between now and May 30th carry on an aggressive and intensive campaign for organization of local and state labor parties wherever possible.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.

The content of this document is reproduced with permission of the Reference Center for Marxist Studies (RCMS), New York, NY.

For additional reprint information, please contact RCMS.