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# Speech to the American Commission of ECCI: Moscow — April 29, 1924

by William Z. Foster [“Dorsey”]

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In his speech the other night, Comrade [Moissaye] Olgin made a point of the fact that [Robert M.] LaFollette was 76 years of age, and that we were pinning our hopes on a man so old. That perhaps was a good argument, but our Party is not interested in whether LaFollette lives or dies. It is classes we are interested in, and it is class forces we are dealing with. If LaFollette is not there, then someone else will be to lead the movement. The reason why so much mention is made of LaFollette is because he is the outstanding leader of that movement.

Comrade Olgin also stated that a new capitalist party was being organized and that we were proposing to affiliate with it. Our Thesis definitely states that if this movement is of a capitalist character, we must not affiliate with it or cooperate with it, but, on the contrary, oppose it at all costs. WE will know whether the capitalists are going along with it by what happens in the Republican convention. If the capitalists show a disposition to go along with it, then we will have a splendid opportunity to split with this movement. That would furnish us with a weapon for the June 17th [1924] Convention that would enable us to split with it and to create a left movement. This would be the best thing that could happen — for LaFollette to get substantial capitalist backing, which he has not got at the present time.

But that argument holds no water. The comparison with [Theodore] Roosevelt does not hold water. Many things have happened in America since 1912. The World War has taken place, and that has had its effect in America as in Europe, although not so extensive, and

the situation has fundamentally altered since the days of Roosevelt. What is taking place now is not a split of a Roosevelt character which was engineered by Roosevelt, who was able to mobilized a lot of unclear, discontented members of the Republican Party. This split is not being carried out by LaFollette, but he is being driven into it. It is a revolt of the masses of these old parties. In Roosevelt's time, it was mainly a Roosevelt movement. This time LaFollette is not leading it, but is being driven on by the movement. The movement is much stronger than LaFollette.

Olgin also stated that when we advocated independent political action for the workers of America, we were not making much progress in that direction when we advocated their going along with another capitalist party. Of course, Olgin, in his eagerness to criticize our program, is inclined probably to run a little bit over the boundary. But our conception of independent political action is not to go along with a capitalist party, but with the Farmer-Labor Party. Our whole policy is aimed clearly and definitely at the creation of such a party.

### **[Workers Party Strong Enough.]**

Another point that Comrade Olgin made in his speech was that the Workers Party is not strong enough to do this thing. Here, I think he gave his whole case away. He argued first that it was wrong in principle to go along with this movement, and then he reverses to the proposition that if our party was strong enough, we could do it. Now it is true that the Workers Party is not very strong. It is true that it has got 17 federations. The Workers Party is a party nevertheless.

There is another point on which Comrade Olgin contradicts himself. He admits that we are the leaders of the Labor Party idea in America and that we will exert a tremendous influence at the June 17th Convention. Everybody must admit that we are the leaders of this movement. Such a condition cannot exist in any other country. And the reason is the general bankruptcy of all the other groups. There is no other group left in the labor movement except the Workers Party.

This is my firm opinion — that the Workers Party does possess enough strength and homogeneity to carry through this maneuver. I was not convinced of that until I took part in a movement in Minnesota, a movement of the Farmer-Labor Federation. [C.E.] Ruthenberg

and I were sent there as negotiators, and I said to Ruthenberg, "What do you suppose our rank-and-file thinks about all these matters of a Labor Party, a Farmer-Labor Party, a Third Party, and so on?" I said I did not think they knew much about them, and Ruthenberg agreed. We then held a caucus of our delegates to the Farmer-Labor Federation in Minnesota, and we had 75 delegates present out of 250 in that Federation. And who were they? They were not Americans. They were Finns, Russians, Ukrainians, Slovaks, all the nationalities we have among our people. I found that our comrades did understand what this convention was about, that our comrades who were in the struggle did know what the movement was all about. The comrades with whom we have to be careful are not so much those who are in the struggle, but those who are not. It should be interesting to know that the principal center of opposition to the Third Party is in New York, where the workers have no experience to speak of with labor parties. In Minnesota our whole organization, so far as I know, is unanimous for going into this movement, because they have had experience with it, and they understand that they can do it.

**[With Regards to Teapot Dome.]**

Olgin stated that we overestimated the question of the Teapot Dome. I do not think we did. [John] Pepper has made some statements about the Teapot Dome which I for one am inclined to disagree with, but I think that the present majority of the Party does not overestimate the importance of the Teapot dome in the situation of the United States.

*(Com. Olgin: "Pepper did all the writing and all the talking about it.")*

I just wanted to indicate to you what the capitalists themselves are saying about the Teapot Dome. We have never said anything one-tenth as severe about the Teapot Dome Affair as the capitalists themselves have. Unquestionably, it is the grates political scandal since the foundation of the American Republic. It has shown up the rottenness of the American government as nothing has ever done before, and in face of the discontent that is prevailing in the Democratic and Republican Parties — both parties are equally involved — to say that that the Teapot Dome is not an important factor is to ignore one of the prime political factors in the American situation at the present

time. I do not think that the Teapot Dome is going to rouse the workers to a clear realization that the government is nothing but an instrument of the capitalists, but it is going to make them discontented with the old parties and throw them into the Third Party movement. If the Third Party movement crystallizes the principal weapon against the old parties will be the Teapot Dome.

*(Com. Rosenberg: "Do you think the Third Party can with the elections?")*

The answer to that is, yes and no. There is not one election, but a thousand elections.

*(Com. Rosenberg: "For President?")*

No, I do not think they can win the Presidential election, but for Governors, Senators, etc. Even if LaFollette does not come out, there will be enough of the Third Party movement in the various states to elect some officers. But if he does split [the Republican Party], then unquestionably they will carry many states, and will be able to create a bloc of Representatives in Congress.

### **[Farmers are Petty Bourgeois.]**

Now about the petty business psychology of the farmers. The farmer is not a proletarian, he is not a wage worker. But he represents a class that is being crushed by American capitalism, and he is in revolt against the capitalists, and in that revolt he thinks that it is possible for him to strike up an alliance with the workers of the country, and everywhere he is doing that. His demands are different, of course. The only way he can agree to go along with the workers in the struggle is upon the most general demands. When you get down to specific demands, there is conflict, but nevertheless this tendency exists for workers and farmers to go along together. The attempt to sweep away the possibility of an alliance between the workers and the poor farmers of America by just saying that the farmers are petty businessmen, and that they have the businessman's psychology, cannot possibly succeed. It will not succeed here and it will not succeed in American political life.

Someone asked, why not organize first the Workers Party and then the farmers? The development started that way. It started in the promotion of a Labor Party. If the labor movement had started from

top down, then the Labor Party would have been formed. But it was impossible to organize the Labor Party in that way, it was impossible to get a strong movement. The farmers attended a convention in 1920 in Chicago, and insisted on being taken in with the workers. In several states they had already set up farmer-labor combinations.

In 1920 the Labor Party changed itself into the Farmer-Labor Party. Why they did not put "Labor" first and "Farmer" second, I do not know. It was not a question of principle, it was a question of euphony. The farmers insisted that the Labor Party was not broad enough for them. They said that labor means trade unionists, and we must put farmer in there, and they put "Farmer" first. They might have put it the other way, but there is no significance attached to it. But everywhere, even in Minnesota, the workers are the leaders of these parties.

Olgin made another statement which seems to me to destroy the case of his group, and that is this. In his thesis he says, and he reiterated the statement time and again:

*[blank space in the stenogram]*

And then again he says:

*[blank space in the stenogram]*

How are you going to emphasize the difference between the Communists and the Labor Party without criticizing the petty bourgeois character of the Labor Party and criticizing its program and leaders and everything else? Either Olgin is wrong here in saying that he can criticize the labor Party, or he is wrong in saying that you cannot criticize the Third Party. I think he is wrong in saying that you cannot criticize the Third Party, but if he is right here, he cannot be right in both places.

## [Participation and Criticism Possible.]

I want to go into that matter just a little. I was somewhat doubtful of the proposition which Comrade Olgin presented here. I may say that the same group which is now opposing the Third Party also opposed the Labor Party, with exactly the same arguments. The argument against going into the Labor Party was that you could not carry on any criticism inside it. But the experience in America shows that it can be carried on, and that it is being carried on very successfully. It has been accomplished in the Labor Party, and it is now being denied that it can be done in the Third Party. If we can criticize a Labor party — and Olgin agrees that it can be done — I say it would be easier to criticize the Third Party, with which we had only a slight connection, than it would be to criticize a Labor Party of which you were an actual part.

Now I was in some doubt about this thing myself. I have had some various experience in criticism of this kind, I watched the situation in Minnesota, where we have the whole thing in operation. Olgin created the impression — I do not think he did it intentionally — he stated his case quite warmly, and the impression is left in the minds of some that we have supported LaFollette.

*(Com. Rosenberg: "Your press has supported LaFollette.")*

Our press has not supported LaFollette. On the contrary, it has pointed out what LaFollette stands for, the weakness of his program, and that it cannot accomplish anything for the workers.

Our Central Executive Committee adopted an attitude in Minnesota about three or four months ago in which we urged our comrades there, with the organization at its disposal, with leaflets, etc., to carry on this campaign of criticism with the whole Third Party movement. Here we found two things coming to light. We found that we could carry on this criticism and that we could intensify it. I agree that our Party must intensify its criticism of the Third Party. We found that we could do it and still remain part of the movement, and still remain the leaders of the movement.

When Ruthenberg and I went to Minnesota in March, we were met by the leaders of the trade union group, and they said, "What do you mean by this — you come along with the movement, and yet you say that it is no good." They produced letters signed by [Joseph]

Manley,<sup>1</sup> which Ruthenberg wrote, criticizing the LaFollette organization. But in spite of the fact that we did criticize them, they could not expel us from the organization, because we were too deeply entrenched in it. That is one thing that came out of it.

The next point was, was this kind of criticism effective? I think that it was, because when we assembled at our conference on March 12th [1924], there were present there ten leaders of the farmers who took part in the general conference that issued the June 17th convention notice. Four months before, those farmers' leaders were everywhere LaFollette's men, and because of our propaganda, because of our speeches and conferences, they had said: "Yes, we will go along with LaFollette if we have to; he does not represent the Farmer-Labor Party that we want, but we must believe in him because farmers on the farms believe in him, and if we are not to lose contact with those masses, we will probably have to go along with them. That is what they are saying. The practical results of the March 12th conference reveal that we can carry on this propaganda and still remain part of the movement; and the propaganda is effective in explaining the true character of this movement.

### **[Split of Old Parties Remains Important.]**

Olgin also stated that we overestimate the extent of the great split which is taking place. Probably we do. Olgin and I agree that the great intellectual of our Party, Pepper, is given somewhat to extravagance in his estimation of this force, but nobody can dispute that the revolt taking place in the Republican and Democratic parties is a tremendous movement of the masses. We may estimate it as carrying one or two millions more than Olgin would, but I think Olgin would agree that it is a big movement. He and I both agree that at the June 17th Convention there will probably be no less than one million workers represented. At July 4th, I think we can safely say that there will be two million more represented through the trade union officials and other organizations. That is only those who will be represented,

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<sup>1</sup> The Irish-born Doctor's son Joseph Manley (1887-1926) was Bill Foster's son-in-law. Despite the family connection, he was for a time in 1923-24 a partisan of the rival faction headed by John Pepper and C.E. Ruthenberg before realigning with the Foster group late in 1924. A structural iron worker by trade, Manley was killed in an industrial accident in August 1926.

for a movement like that would carry large masses with it, and it therefore represents a great mass movement.

Comrade Olgin says that this split will not divide the trade union bureaucracy. Even though it is nothing more than a petty bourgeois movement, when they see Gompers lining up with the Democratic or Republican party, those forces within the American Federation of Labor who are progressive enough to line up with the new party must inevitably split from the Gompers bureaucracy. It follows from the very nature of the thing that such a split will take place. You will find at the next convention of the AF of L that for the first time there will be a clear line between the representatives of the new political movement and the representative of the Gompers policy. The miners organization has declared many times for the formation of a Farmer-Labor Party, and voted in favor of affiliation. But due to the control of [John] Lewis at the last convention, and the way he was able to present the question, he got the convention to go on record that although they were in favor of the new party, for the time being they would support the old one. The organization has sent delegates to the Cleveland conference [Conference for Progressive Political Action] a couple of times, and if a movement such as this takes shape, the overwhelming majority of the mine workers will go with it; if not Lewis himself, the whole machinery of the organization will go with it.

### **[The Two Coming Conventions of 1924.]**

I am going to talk a little about these two conventions, June 17th [Federated Farmer-Labor Party] and July 4th [Conference for Progressive Political Action]. One of the main points of the whole question was: who was going to be represented in June 17th and who was going to be represented in July 4th? What is the fundamental difference, if any, between those two conventions? There has been the impression created, partly from Olgin's speech, and I feel partly from my own, that the June 17th Convention is fundamentally different from the July 4th Convention, that the June 17th will be a gathering of semi-revolutionary proletarians and bankrupt farmers, and that the other will just be a middle class gathering. That is not true. In fact, although June 17th at the present time has more of a proletarian character, yet it is quite possible that before the election takes place the June 17th Convention will take on more of a petty bourgeois charac-



ter than the July 4th Convention, because of its strategic situation as regards date.

I have a little clipping here which is important. This clipping says:

“The national third party movement will be launched in New York State next Thursday evening at the home of Samuel Swett, according to an announcement made yesterday at the headquarters of the Committee of 48. the meeting will be the first of a series to precede a state convention, which will be held in May and which will elect delegates to the Third Party National Convention at St. Paul, Minn. on June 17.”

And what is the Committee of 48? The Committee of 48 is the liberal organization of America — it is the only organization which the liberals have. In 1920, at the convention of the Farmer-Labor Party — its first convention — the Committee of 48 sent 500 delegates to that convention, and it is quite possible that in the face of the present situation, that this organization could muster from 400 to 500 delegates again for the June 17th Convention. Who are the representatives of the Committee of 48? Doctors, lawyers, small manufacturers, preachers, and so on — typical middle class. The Committee of 48 is invited to the June 17th Convention. It is part of it, and it is quite possible that the Committee of 48 will send so many delegates there that it will take on even more of a petty bourgeois character than the convention of July 4th. And why? Because the Republican Convention takes place a couple of days before the 17th, and if LaFollette forces a split in the Republican Convention, they will immediately come over to June 17th. If they are convinced now in their minds that they are going to split at the Republican Convention, they will immediately make preparations to get control of the June 17th Convention, and will send their delegates there. It is quite possible that for the Third Party the June 17th Convention will be more important than July 4th. So we must not think here that the June 17th Convention is going to be made up of a lot of proletarians and semi-proletarians.

### **[No Fundamental Differences of Conventions.]**

Nor, on the other hand, can we hold up the July 4th Convention as something fundamentally different from June 17th. We are dealing with a gathering that carries with it all the possibilities of being con-

trolled by middle class elements. Not only that, but it is quite possible that at the June 17th Convention, the Workers Party and the Federated Farmer-Labor Party will not be seated as delegates. If these other people are determined to flood the convention with their delegates and to take charge of it, then it is quite possible that the Workers Party and the Federated will not be seated. Even as it was, we had a great deal of trouble at the conference of March 12th to get the Workers Party and the Federated Farmer-Labor Party seated. What will happen if they take that convention away from us?

The point is if we agree that we can go along with the June 17th Convention and make a fight to turn that organization into something, and as it carries with it the possibility of bourgeois leadership and control, how can we draw the line against the July 4th Convention? It is quite possible, on the other hand, that the July 4th Convention will have a much more working class content than June 17th. Because if the Republican politicians, LaFollette and his group, decide that they are going to make their showing on the 17th, that will destroy the importance of July 4th, and the consequence will be that whatever Presidential candidate will be nominated by these liberals will be nominated on June 17th, and who will want to go to the July 4th Convention? What will be left for July 4th to do? Just to endorse the propositions of June 17th. If we endeavor to formulate a policy on the supposition that the June 17th Convention is a pure institution, and that the July 4th is a petty bourgeois organization, we are going to get entirely off the stroke. The important thing is, why is there a June 17th Convention, and why are there two conventions?

Before I come to that, I should go back and say this: The main difference between June 17th and July 4th is, as Olgin and I have pointed out, that June 17th is a rank-and-file gathering and July 4th is a convention of officials. But June 17th can quite easily lose that rank and file character if the liberals flow in, and this report shows that the liberals are going there, which may mean 300, 400, or 500 delegates.

What is going to happen to the workers? They are going to have a hard fight for it. The [June 17th St. Paul] convention is being held amidst an agricultural community 450 miles from Chicago, and it is going to be difficult to get trade union representatives in large numbers. The liberals, the doctors and lawyers have money; they can go. The farmers can also go, because it will be held in a farming district, but the workers will have great difficulty. I think, however, in spite of

that fact, we should participate in the June 17th Convention, that we must participate in the June 17th. The point I want to emphasize is that we must not assume that this is fundamentally different from July 4th.

**[The Conference for Progressive Political Action.]**

I think we have secured June 17th. That is the important question for us to discuss. I will tell you why we have got it. Why are we not going to July 4th — why are the Workers Party and Federated Farmer-Labor Party not going to the July 4th? It is because the Conference for Progressive Political Action, which organized July 4th, would not allow the Workers Party and the Federated to go there. The Workers Party tried to be affiliated with the Conference for Progressive Political Action. They sent delegates to the Cleveland convention of that organization a little over a year ago [Dec. 11-12, 1922], but they refused to seat the delegates of the Workers Party, they refused to allow them to take part in the convention. The Workers Party was so anxious to become a member of this organization, which it now deems to be so terrible, that when one of our comrades who was present there did not fight for the admission of the Workers Party to this organization (and characteristically he came from the extreme right wing), they expelled him from the Party.

Somebody may say that since that time the Conference for Progressive Political Action has become conservative and we can not go along with such an institution. That is not true. The Conference for Progressive Political Action is more radical now than it ever was. The Workers Party is in this kind of a position: We are like a man who fell in love with a woman, and when she said she did not want him, he replied that he did not want her anyhow. Now we have become so pure that we will not even have any kind of an understanding or alliance with this party, even though it will lead to the desertion of a whole section of our forces. We cannot have any connection with this body whatsoever! We have elected to draw a line here and make it a question of real principle between us. We are, of course, making it a question of principle, and with the great masses we can draw a tremendous distinction between June 17th and July 4th. But this is not the place to draw distinctions that do not exist. We have to put our cards on the table, and tell you what these two conventions really are.

## [June 17th Date a Compromise.]

Now I want to say this: Our convention was originally called for May 30th and not June 17th. June 17th is a compromise. We wanted to hold our convention on May 30th for this reason — so that we could have our convention before the Republican and Democratic parties had their conventions. We could then have taken independent action regardless of LaFollette and regardless of all these politicians in the old parties. We went to Minnesota about holding the convention on May 30th. We said that that would bring the proletarian elements together, while if we waited till July 4th, then the politicians and liberals would come in. We were divided on May 30th. We had a bit fight on the Central Executive Committee on the matter, but both groups agreed that we must fight for May 30th, because that would give us a more proletarian convention. But when we went to Minnesota, they said no. They wanted to go along with the Third Party movement, and they said, if you insist upon May 30th, then we split and we shall go to July 4th.

That was the essence of their position. And what did we do in the circumstances? We had to compromise. We had to agree, not on July 4th, but on a middle date, on June 17th. We kept them away from the July 4th Convention. However, that was a bad compromise. We knew that because June 17th came after the Republican Convention, and we knew that the politicians would come to June 17th if they were going to split, and if they were not going to split, they would come in order to split us.

*(Com. Rosenberg: "When is the Republican Convention?")*

June 10th. The important thing is that they will have time to come to us.

When we made this compromise, it threw open the door to these liberal elements. Ruthenberg, [Bill] Dunne, and I and five other members of the Executive Committee went to Minnesota to handle this matter, and we got a unanimous vote, with the exception of one representative, who is not a member of the Executive Committee. All the members of the Executive Committee voted for accepting this compromise, because May 30th would be a Communist convention. When we got back to the Central Executive Committee, our report

was adopted unanimously. [Ludwig] Lore, who is the representative on our committee of the Anti-Third Party tendency, also voted to accept it. If we could have split successfully, that would have been the opportunity to split, and when we compromised, we admitted that we had to admit the petty bourgeois element, and we realized that we were opening the gates to them. It was clear that we could not do anything else — we had to do it.

Olgin spoke for over an hour, and I think he spoke about three or four minutes on the question of isolation. He made very little of that. His speech was mostly in the form of a criticism of the majority position, a criticism of LaFollette and the LaFollette program, and the whole question of the alliance. But when it came to the alternative of what would happen to us if we did not proceed with this thing, he touched very little upon that subject.

### **[Consequences of Splitting.]**

But to us that is equally important as what will happen if we do go along with it. What will happen if we split on June 17th? That depends on the nature of the split. If we put up William F. Dunne for President, then we get a bad split; no one is left but Communists. If the question we split on is that LaFollette has got a capitalist party, then we get a big split. If it occurs on the question of our cooperating with the LaFollette group, and we say, no, but the convention decided to cooperate with them on the question of a common candidate, then we get a bad split; because the people who are involved in this are workers and farmers who look up to this LaFollette group as their spokesmen. They have never had any labor leaders in Congress, and these are the men who have been fighting for such radical ideas as come before the American Congress. They represent the trade union point of view so far as the masses of the workers understand, they represent their interests as well as all the rest of the opposition point of view in the United States.

I believe that if we split on the question of failing to agree with them on a common candidate, it will be a bad split that will isolate us. It will not isolate us for a few months, as Olgin said, but it will be a serious isolation for our Party, it will extend over a long period. And for this reason: We have been the champions of the Labor Party idea in America. We have fought for it in every labor union in the country, and we have identified ourselves with it. If just at the crucial point,

when the movement is passing through this crisis, we split with that movement, it means we lose the issue of the Labor Party completely. We could still talk about it, but everyone would laugh at us.

The Labor Party question is primarily a trade union question as far as the workers are concerned. It is the trade unions that are building this Labor party, as far as the working class section is concerned. This split on the question of the Labor party will extend itself to all our work in the trade unions, because the principal question concerning the trade unions at the present time is the formation of a Labor party. If we put ourselves in the position of betraying the Labor Party idea by splitting this convention, we practically isolate ourselves not only on the question of the Labor Party, but on all the questions we are raising in the trade unions at the present time.

### **[Lack of Alternatives.]**

Comrade Olgin in his statement was rather vague on one or two points that I would like him to explain a little more clearly if he could. That is, the question of whom shall we nominate on June 17th. If we had identified with us men prominent enough in the eyes of American labor, so that we could carry the center of this convention — the trade union group — with us in a struggle against these petty bourgeois leaders like LaFollette, I should say, “Yes, let us nominate that man, and tell LaFollette to have his own convention.” But we have no such man in the American labor movement. Some of the members of Olgin’s group — I do not know how he feels about it — have even suggested that I should be the candidate for President of the United States. But you must understand that if I am nominated on June 17th, what does our Labor Party movement become? Just a Communist movement, nothing else. Not only that, it would put our Party in a ridiculous position. I would be a good nominee for the Workers Party, but not for the Farmer-Labor Party. They would say, “Why does not the Workers Party nominate him, and not the Farmer-Labor Party?”

Then, on the other hand, some of the Olgin group take the position that they will accept LaFollette. The thing swings from Foster to LaFollette. That is quite an elastic position. I think that the thesis of the minority is confused on this whole question. It is full of contradictions. For example, they say they will draw up a program that includes nationalization of the railroads, nationalization of natu-

ral resources, and so forth; and then they say this — if this program is not accepted by the majority of the convention, we will yield on point C, which is the program. Now if you are going to yield on the program, what have you done? You have opened the door for an alliance with the Third Party, because what is left if you are not going to hold fast on a program? You send your committee to the July 4th convention with your program. They are going to nominate LaFollette. Well, he will not accept your program.

This thesis says you will go along with this provided that LaFollette accepts the program, but you are not going to insist on the program. That is a contradiction in itself. You will send your committee to July 4th to negotiate with them on candidates and program. They already have a candidate in mind, you will accept him if he goes along with your program, but you will not insist on your program. What objection is there then to accepting him? There is no objection. You have laid the basis for an alliance with these two parties. On the question of the formation of a Labor Party, LaFollette does not have to agree upon that; nor need he agree on the question of the inclusion of the Communists. The main thing is the question of the program. If you yield on the program, then you must accept the candidate they have nominated.

### **[Regarding Opportunism.]**

Probably before this discussion is over, you will hear a great deal about my being an opportunist — not from Olgin, but possibly from the other delegate [John Pepper] if he arrives. At any rate, I do not think I was very much of an opportunist when I refused to accept the invitation of the minority group to stand as a candidate for President. I had at least that good opportunity. In fact, I myself nominated Bill Dunne as candidate. He is the nominee of the Workers Party.

### **[Prospective Programs.]**

Now with regard to the prospective programs for these conventions. June 17 Convention has a program. This is what you have to agree to in order to participate in that convention: public ownership, government banking, no restriction of civil liberties, abolition of injunctions in labor disputes. That is LaFollette's program. What do we mean by "public ownership?" That is not nationalization. LaFollette

will stand for government ownership of the railroads, and possibly the mines and stockyards, but not government ownership of natural resources — only public control of natural resources. This is the program of June 17th Convention as far as it has progressed as the present time. The difference between that and the program that is acceptable to July 4th Convention is practically nil. I will say that due to the power that the Workers Party will have in that convention, it will be quite possible for us to go there and adopt a radical program, that is, compared to this. We could get the principle of nationalization generally accepted, and we could add various other features to the program which we could get adopted, but with this proviso — that we do not use it as a splitting point. They will insist that there must be a juncture of these two bodies in the common struggle that is confronting them.

Now what is likely to happen? We should discuss this, not only in the abstract, but what is likely to happen at these conventions. My judgment of the situation is this: In all likelihood the LaFollette group will split from the Republican Party. It is not certain, but the likelihood is that way. I think most of us are agreed upon that. If so, they will come to the June 17th Convention, they will fight to unseat the Workers Party and the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, but I doubt whether they can succeed in unseating our delegates. I believe we can force our way in that convention regardless of any force that they bring in, unless they swamp the convention in such a manner even beyond our calculation. We can get that convention to endorse a platform considerably more radical than this. We can get that convention to go on record for the formation of a Farmer-Labor Party.

I do not think, however, that it will be possible for us to form the party immediately without a split. If we insist upon the immediate formation of the Party, then we will probably force a split. How bad that will be will depend upon the circumstances. Probably what would happen would be that these Republican politicians would come to the convention if they are going to split, secure the nomination of the candidate they desire, and if they could not get that nomination, they would split the convention. If the Republican politicians secure the nomination at this convention of the man they want, if they take this convention and make it the principal instrument of their movement, then July 4th Convention will have very little significance in the way of nominating a candidate, because they would follow suit.



*(Com Rosenberg: "If the Republican Convention nominates LaFollette himself?)*

Then, of course, we split. If the Republican Convention nominates LaFollette, that destroys July 4th; as far as we are concerned, we split with July 4th, and the convention itself will split, and some will come with us. Then we pick out the best candidate we have and go ahead. That would be the best for us, but that will not happen, I'm afraid.

What will take place, assuming that we sent a committee to July 4th, is that they will say to us we will not agree to the formation of a Farmer-Labor Party, we will not agree to your radical program, we will not agree to go with the Communists. Then we split, as far as actual contact is concerned, but not upon the question of a common candidate. Even though both movements are hostile, they will agree on one candidate. The two movements may be quite distinct, and still both be supporting the same candidate for President. After all, this question of an alliance is quite a thin position. It may actually develop into nothing beyond the mere support of a common candidate.

### **[Tendencies Within the Movements.]**

Now I want to say something about the tendencies at work in these movements. To consider the actual situation is nothing, we must consider the way it is going. The impression has been left here, not particularly by Olgin, but from the general discussion, that what we are advocating is a union between the Farmer-Labor forces and the petty bourgeois forces. That is not so. Our whole policy is to create a division between these forces. They are united now, and our policy is to split them. It is true they are going to assemble in two different conventions, but ideologically they are united and our policy is to split them. First of all there is a general revolt of the workers, farmers, and the lower middle class against the old parties. Then the tendency is for a split between these two forces, and our maneuver is to bring about that split. Everything we have written and done has pointed that out clearly. But in order to bring about this split, it cannot be accomplished instantly. In our judgment, we must at least support a common candidate for President. If we go to the extent of saying that we will have nothing to do with this, then instead of accomplishing

this split, we accomplish the amalgamation of the farmer forces with the petty bourgeoisie — and we will be left alone.

### **[The Minnesota Model.]**

What is happening in Minnesota? In Minnesota the Third Party forces split from the Republican and Democratic parties. Immediately the Third Party came into existence — this petty bourgeois party which contains small manufacturers and even an occasional banker — we saw in this party a new division. We saw the poor farmers and organized workers forming their organizations and strengthening them. The Non-Partisan League of farmers and the Non-Partisan League of the workers formed together into a Farmer-Labor Federation, and it is now the dominant factor inside the Farmer-Labor Party, and they have already created a split inside the Farmer-Labor Party; the severance of this Third Party from the Farmer-Labor Federation is likely to happen at any time. The tendency is for a Farmer-Labor Party to shape itself out of this revolt.

But if a split had taken place along these lines in Minnesota at the beginning, we would have had nobody. We would have had our own Communists and nothing else. But by gathering our forces in the movement and then forcing a split with the other elements, we will get a genuine Farmer-Labor Party in Minnesota. Our whole policy will be to split this Third Party and take away the proletarian elements from it into our own organization. But, just as we saw the danger of splitting the Farmer-Labor Party in Minnesota, in the same way we cannot divide this big movement at this particular juncture. We must, provided it is not a big capitalist party, go along with it to the extent of a common candidate for President.

### **[A Difficult Tactic for a Difficult Situation.]**

Now we admit that this Third Party alliance is a difficult tactic, but it is a difficult situation. A Communist Party is confronted with a difficult situation from time to time, and it has to meet that situation. The Russian Communist Party in 1917 was also confronted with a very serious situation. The Russian Communist Party did something which all the world said was impossible. They took charge of a situation where the percentage of workers was practically negligible and overwhelmed by peasants. They took charge of that situation and car-

ried it through. And they were confronted with a still more difficult situation. We have the Comintern to guide us.

If we do not go through with this maneuver they will say that the Communist Party cannot trust itself to go with the masses and with the American workers. It is true we would cover our retreat up with a lot of phraseology and say that the Third Party was a danger to the Labor Party movement and was under a petty bourgeois leadership, but the fact of the matter remains that the Communist Party would have withdrawn from the masses. That is an impossible position for the Communist Party to take.

### [Questions Answered.]<sup>2</sup>

Now I am going to answer some of the questions I have not already touched upon in my remarks. One question was, "How many poor farmers are participating in this movement, and what percentage of the movement is tenants?" It is practically impossible to estimate the total number of farmers who are participating in this movement, because they have no definite organizations.

*(Com. Rosenberg: The Non-Partisan League is a definite organization.)*

The Non-Partisan League is opposed to this movement. It is a very reactionary organization at the present time and it is abstaining. The Farmer-Labor Party of Washington, which is the second largest party in the state after the Republican Party, is participating in this movement. The industrial workers are the real leaders of the movement, but the overwhelming masses of those supporting it are farmers. For example, in Minnesota the Third Party polled over 325,000 votes, and out of these the great masses were farmers, and poor farmers at that. It is true there were fringes of the small manufacturing class and better-off farmers, but generally speaking they were poor farmers and workers. At the June 17th Convention, the great majority of those who will go will be tenants and bankrupt farmers, and they will cast the overwhelming majority of votes. But exact statistics cannot be had.

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<sup>2</sup> It was long traditional in Russia at meetings for written questions to be passed to the chairman for answer at the conclusion of a speaker's prepared public remarks. It is presumed that these rather disjointed answers by Foster were made to such written inquiries.

Do these farmers employ workers themselves? Most of them do not employ workers, because the industry is so highly organized, particularly among the wheat farmers, and those are the ones who are mostly involved. They farm their land without help, except for three or four weeks in the summer. They have not got the outlook of the farmers who employ farm hands steadily. Many of them go out to work. It is characteristic of the American poor farmer that he has a close affinity with the proletariat. They do employ workers occasionally themselves, but it is not enough to drive a wedge between them and the working class. When the Non-Partisan League was at the height of its power, it had an understanding with the IWW. Many of the bankrupt farmers have gone into the cities and are now working as industrial workers. In Butte [Montana] about half of the men working as miners are farmers driven off the land. The fact that the farmers may employ workers occasionally does not make it impossible for them to set up this alliance of workers and farmers.

Another question was, the difference between the Federated Farmer-Labor Party and the Farmer-Labor Party. The national Farmer-Labor Party was under the control of [John] Fitzpatrick. On July 3rd, 4th, and 5th of last year [1923], we had a convention of the Workers Party and Fitzpatrick's Farmer-Labor Party. The latter, headed by Fitzpatrick, split from the convention, and a new Federated Farmer-Labor Party was formed. Is this an independent organization? The Federated Farmer-Labor Party is our party, controlled by Communists. The Farmer-Labor Party is now practically destroyed; it amounts to little more than a name. Fitzpatrick was so overcome by this split, that he has gone over to Gompers, and has now adopted the Gompers policy.

The next question was, "Why not the Labor-Farmer Party?" It was more or less an accident that the name was adopted in that order. But the natural alignment inside the party is that labor takes the lead and the farmers follow. I must state, however, that so far as the biggest leaders are concerned, the leaders of the farmers are showing more initiative than the trade union leaders at the present time.

Will June 17th Convention have a program of its own, and will the Workers Party have a right to change this program? The conven-

tion will adopt a program, and there will be a fight to make that program very brief. Nearly all the organizations will want to make it very brief. But whatever the program is, the Workers Party will maintain its individuality and its freedom of propaganda. Not only that, but it will strain beyond the natural limits set up by such an organization to the extent of just verging upon expulsion, if necessary, so that the Workers Party can propagate its own program, even though it formally accepts the program of the Labor Party.

In reply to a question on the Farmer-Labor Parties, these parties in America are federations, and the organization of the Workers Party is completely separate.

Can the new movement break the power of the old parties? I answered that by stating that they cannot elect a President, except in this way: It is possible for them to carry so many states, probably Minnesota, Idaho, Montana, Washington, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, Wisconsin, Oregon, and many other states. They could not carry the industrial cities nor the Southern states. They may get enough of these so that the question is thrown into the Congress to decide, and some of them even hold that, in that case, they could have the question settled in favor of the progressive forces. But I doubt it very much. The most that can be accomplished is that they will elect a number of Governors, many Senators, and a great number of Representatives, and thereby shattering these old parties, and destroying them in many states, and forcing an amalgamation such as they have done in Minnesota. That is, provided the LaFollette forces organize the Third Party split. But if they continue with the Republican Party, then we nominate a candidate at the June 17th Convention, and we will have our own program. What we could carry is doubtful. We might carry a state here and there.

Have the workers employed by the farmers a separate movement or are they the same organization with the farmers? There is no stationary class so far as these farm workers are concerned. They are floating, migratory workers, and insofar as they have an organization, they belong to the IWW. But only a small number are organized; they usually have no home, they have no funds, and consequently they do not take any active part politically.

Was it worthwhile to lose our influence among the Chicago industrial workers in order to gain influence amongst the farmers? I would say — no. Most emphatically, no. WE understand that this movement must be led by the workers, and I consider it a great disaster that we split in Chicago. Many disagree with me on this account, but in all our maneuvers, in all our policies, we try to bear constantly in mind that it must be the workers to whom we should look to lead this movement. Our general aim is to get them, and not the farmers, even though at the present time the farmers are showing more responsiveness than are the workers to this revolt.

Why can we not disregard the Third Party? Because that would result in a split that would isolate us. Why could not LaFollette be nominated without the formation of a Third Party? I pointed out that that is very likely to happen. They may not form any Third Party at all. Many of these trade union leaders may say that the others have nominated LaFollette, we will endorse it, as the Third Party may die out.

What is the extent of the discord in the Party, that is, the size of the group that is opposed to the Third Party maneuver? The issue before the last convention of the Party was the question of the Third Party. That was the basis upon which the convention was selected.

*(Com. Olgin: "I beg to differ...")*

I will give my explanation, and Olgin can make such correction as he feels may be necessary. The November [1923] thesis was published in the papers, and I will not attempt to say that it was exhaustively discussed by the membership, but it was discussed by the most active elements. I do not think that there were any members in the Party who did not have some idea about it. The way we elect our convention is at the district conventions. These district conventions were held all over the United States, and the CEC sent a representative to every district convention, and the big question in every one of these conventions was the question of the Third Party alliance. At New York, Delaware [*sic*; *Detroit?*], Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh, in all these conventions, this question of the Third Party alliance was discussed, and the CEC made that the central fight. They tried to make that the central fight and exclude everything else from the conventions, with the result that out of 52 delegates, there were only some 12 or 14, not over 14, who represented the anti-Third Party idea.

That is probably a pretty fair expression of the rank-and-file upon the subject, except that the tendency, when I left the United States, was for the anti-Third Party group to go over quite substantially to the position of the CEC on this question. A number of the most active comrades are abandoning their opposition to it.

What is the difference between LaFollette and [William] Borah? Borah is more of a conservative than LaFollette. He would not go quite so far with government ownership. He would not have as much of a labor program as LaFollette. Borah has no very definite program, whereas LaFollette has. Borah is a sort of free lance — today he advocates one thing, tomorrow another. Borah is much more closely connected with capitalist interests than is LaFollette. He is the righthand man of Coolidge at the present time, and he is going to be chairman of the Republican Convention. He has the reputation of having been a progressive in the past, but he was the man that prosecuted [Big Bill] Haywood, [Charles Moyer, and George Pettibone].<sup>3</sup>

What trade union leaders have declared for the Third Party and how do they make war against Gompers? The trade union leaders have not declared for the Third Party as yet. So far as they have gone, they allowed a sort of sentiment to prevail at their recent St. Louis conference in favor of the Third Party, but a couple days later, at a conference in Chicago, they endorsed [William G.] McAdoo for President on a Democratic ticket. Almost all of them are in favor of a Third Party, but they will not commit themselves publicly and take any definite stapes towards its formation unless they are driven to it.

With regard to the Socialist Party, it is very weak and has no more than 7,000 to 8,000 members, and has no prospect, except in New York.<sup>4</sup> [Morris] Hillquit is making desperate efforts to save his Party.

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<sup>3</sup> The typewritten transcript reads “Haywood,” with a line left blank and the word “Mooney” and the initial “P” later added in ink. Reference is clearly to the 1907 trial of Haywood, Moyer, and Pettibone, at which Borah acted as one of two lead prosecutors. Borah had no connection with the trial of Tom Mooney and Warren Billings in connection with the 1916 Preparedness Day bombing in San Francisco.

<sup>4</sup> Although it publicly claimed for itself 18,000 members in 1924, recent scholarship indicates the Socialist Party of America actually maintained a paid membership slightly in excess of 10,000 for 1923 and 1924, gradually falling below 8,000 by 1927.

They intended to hold a convention in May [1924], but they cancelled it to July 6th, so that they could see what would happen at the other conventions. If no Third Party is formed, they may put up a candidate. We do not know whether they would put up Debs. That would be a very serious situation, a difficult situation, but Debs is sick, and it is very questionable if he could run. But I think if he were going to be nominated by them, they would have got into action before.

With regard to the character of the Third Party and the backing of LaFollette by the press. LaFollette is very little supported by the capitalist press of the United States. I do not know of a single big paper that supports LaFollette. The liberal press and the farmer press support him. The big capitalist papers are against him largely because he [didn't support] the war. They have him down as a pro-German, an anti-patriot, a Bolshevik — although he is quite a conservative. If a big split develops in the Republican Convention, a section of the press will go with LaFollette.

A question was asked, "What will happen in the technical way if we support the Third Party?" My conception of supporting the Third Party will involve very little technical support. Just as I have said, agreement upon a common candidate does not carry with it any technical cooperation to speak of.

Comrade Lozovsky asked what is the influence of the Workers Party and Trade Union Educational League among the masses, and what proportion of these masses we could draw with us. That depends on the issue. The American workers and small farmers are in a state of ferment now, but they have no clear, definite program. They are in favor of certain maneuvers and against certain others. There is no real logic to their program as measured by revolutionary movements in other countries. The influence we have depends on what stand we take. If we split upon these issues, we will get a split according to the importance of the issues in the minds of the workers.

Another question was, "If the majority at the June 17th Convention is against us, can we stay inside and carry on propaganda for our program?" I have said before that I am sure we could stay inside and push our own program, even though the majority is against us. In



fact, the majority must be against us, otherwise it would be a Communist convention. My statement that we can stay inside is based on the assumption that the majority will be against us.

Comrade Kuusinen asked “How can we prevent the liberals from sabotaging the Labor Party, as stated in our November thesis?” The way we can prevent them from sabotaging is the way we prevented them in Minnesota. The liberals there carried on the bitterest kind of struggle against our activities in Minnesota, but by maintaining contact with the masses and holding fast to the principle of the labor Party, we succeeded in gathering round us such masses of workers and farmers that the liberals have been unable to prevent the formation of a labor group inside the Farmer-Labor Federation of Minnesota. We are convinced that we can continue that method and create this Farmer-Labor Party in spite of anything that they may do to try and prevent us.

What are the dangers of supporting the Third Party? I do not think that requires so much an answer from me, as Olgin has explained that quite extensively. I will say in conclusion that all the arguments of Olgin as to the danger of our being lost in the Third Party and not being able to present our own program, I understand as well as he does. But I believe that these dangers can be averted by the Comintern keeping a firm hand on the American situation. If the Comintern issues instructions to the American Party to bring forward its own program at these conventions, and that all candidates of the Party must secure election on the basis of communism; if that is done, then the danger of being lost in the movement, of not making our position clear to the workers, is obviated. The solution is that strict instructions should be issued in that direction, and we should see that they are carried out.

*Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport*

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