
Our Policy in the Farmer-Labor Party: A Letter to a Group of Finnish Comrades. [May 7, 1924]

by C.E. Ruthenberg

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Dear Comrades:

Your statement in regard to the policy which the CEC has instructed the Minnesota comrades to follow in relation to the Farmer-Labor Party, in which you state your criticisms of the policy outlined by the CEC has been considered by the CEC and I am instructed to send you the following reply:

In the first two paragraphs of your letter you state the fact that our Party has for some time now given the greater part of its strength to the work of building up the Farmer-Labor Party in the United States and contrast to the policy which the Party has followed the new policy which has been laid down for the Party within the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota. From your letter it appears that you are under the impression that the Party has been following one policy up to the time of the Minnesota statement and has now suddenly adopted a new policy. For, you say in your letter, "Then like a thunderbolt we received instructions that the Communists must put up their own candidates."

We are compelled to assume, from these statements, that you have not clearly understood the Party policy in relation to the FLP and are under some misapprehension as to our purpose in supporting the Farmer-Labor Party. From the viewpoint of the CEC there has been no change of policy at all. We have been supporting organization of a Farmer-Labor Party through which masses of workers and farmers could be arrayed in opposition to and would enter into a struggle against the capitalist parties and the capitalist government. Our purpose in supporting the building of the FLP and arraying the workers and farmers in a

struggle against capitalist parties was and is through the experiences of their struggle to develop their revolutionary consciousness and class action by the workers and farmers.

The instructions of the CEC to the Minnesota DEC [District Executive Committee] were that our Party must nominate its candidates in the FLP primaries and that these candidates must announce themselves as Communists and must propagate their Communist principles during the campaign. The instructions further stated that if our candidates are defeated in the FLP primaries, we shall then support in the election campaign the candidates selected by the FLP in the primaries.

We do not understand how anything more could be asked of us by the FLP and how we, as Communists, could do anything less than this.

From your letter we gain the impression that it is your views that we support the FLP, not as Communists, but as Farmer-Laborites, that is, that we should not, at any stage or at any time within the FLP, advocate more than the program which the FLP stands for. If we follow such a policy, how would we be different from the followers and supporters of the FLP who are not Communists? What right would we have to call ourselves a Communist Party and distinguish ourselves from the mass of followers of the FLP?

We do not become Communists by merely calling ourselves by the name "Communists." IN order to justify our calling our Party a Communist Party are the struggle for a proletarian revolution, for Soviets, and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. If we are a Communist Party, then we must carry on such a struggle. That is what the CEC directed the comrades

in Minnesota to do. Our instructions were, in effect, that while we remain part of the FLP, while we loyally support the FLP in its struggle against the capitalist parties, within the FLP we carry on a struggle to win the workers and farmers for our program of a proletarian revolution, the Soviets, and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

The CEC well understands that the moment that we raise Communist issues in the FLP United Front, we will find ourselves in conflict with the so-called progressives. Naturally, these progressives want us to be only progressives and not Communists, but certainly you would not argue that we should be more progressives and not Communists. The policy which you suggest, however, would lead exactly to that result. Therefore, as Communists, in place of becoming frightened because we find ourselves in conflict with certain progressives, we should welcome this conflict as the best indication and proof that we are following a Communist policy.

You state in your letter that one of our comrades “has been treated like an enemy instead of a friend by those progressives whom we were expecting to get into the Party,” as a result of the policy dictated by the CEC. If this is the case, comrades, then you have the best evidence that those progressives whom you expect to get into the Party are far from being ripe for membership in our Party. It is in the conflicts which arise in the United Front that the test is made whether any of the progressives who stand with us and work with us in spite of the fact that we show our Communist face and follow our Communist policies are the ones who are ripe for Party membership, not those who desert us and become our enemies the moment we show in the least that we are Communists.

In closing your letter, you ask the question, “The question is what is really the policy of our Party in regard to the Labor Party. Have we meant anything by all our propaganda or not?” We answer that we have meant everything we have said in regard to the FLP. We answer that it will be a great step forward for the American Labor movement if a mass party on a na-

tional scale is formed which will throw the workers and farmers into the struggle against the capitalist parties, but we answer also that we cannot be satisfied, we Communists, with the attainment of the goal of the formation of such a Party. That is not the goal which we are striving for. Our aim is for the formation of such a Party, and then to work within that Party and force it forward, step by step, as the lessons of experience make possible, into more revolutionary action against the capitalist government. That is our task as a Communist Party. We cannot fulfill that task unless we raise, in contrast to the FLP program, the Communist program — unless we point out to the workers and farmers, as the struggle goes on, that there is something more to be done than the FLP program calls for.

In Minnesota, we have taken the first step to perform this Communist duty, we have made the first move to differentiate ourselves as Communists from the Farmer-Laborites. The result, comrades, in place of bringing the calamity which you fear, has already been to greatly strengthen our Party.

For all of those reasons, the CEC has not concurred in your proposal that our candidates in the Eighth Congressional District withdraw. It instructs the Party membership in that district to carry on a Communist campaign, to nominate our candidates as the candidates of the FLP in the FL primaries. If we are defeated in the primaries, then we shall pledge our support in the election campaign and will vote for, at the November elections, the candidate who is nominated by the FLP.

We trust that this statement of the Party policy will clarify the issue for you and that you will see the correctness of the policy which has been authorized by the CEC.

Fraternally yours,

C.E. Ruthenberg,
Executive Secretary.

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