Political Romancing Must Give Way to Realism

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We have had a period of legal romancing to which the "illegal romancing," so called, of underground days can not hold a candle. Let's quote [John] Pepper in proof. (*Liberator,* Sept. 1923) "The bankrupt farmers are overthrowing the most sacred fundamental law of capitalism, namely, cash payment, and do not pay their debts. The Negroes of the South are making an unarmed Spartacus uprising." And again, same issue: "The coming third (LaFollette) revolution will not be a proletarian revolution. It will be a revolution of well-to-do and exploited farmers, small businessmen, and workers. The revolution will come through the ballot and, as Magnus Johnson foretells, THROUGH FORCE OF ARMS."

Well, comrades, the LaFollette revolution, for some time, seems to have passed its peak. And not a shot has yet been fired. And the unarmed Negro Spartacus uprisings of the South resulted in a solid Negro vote for Coolidge. Capitalism is on the decline, sure enough, but we seemed to have misjudged the tempo of this decline and the political reaction to it, by many a mile. This cross-eyed evaluation of a year and a half ago led us into opportunist swamps, from which we had to extricate ourselves, with a big boost from the Communist International.

Take our first "big success" in this skirmish of ours for a labor party. On July 3-4, 1923, there was organized in Chicago the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. It was heralded a "mass party of 616,000 workers and farmers connected with the new party not merely formally through high officials but through a rank and file representation." And then, the minute we lost a few high officials, the Fitzpatrick group in Chicago, and a few other high officials in various other "strongholds of the labor party idea," the FFLP wrinkled up and died, the last "optimistic" report issued being that we had all of a party of 100,000 left — that is, ourselves and our nearest relatives.

What was our error? We were crazy for a Farmer-Labor Party. We saw immense masses where in reality only single crooked leaders stood. The capitalist crisis was not severe enough to move the workers and farmers towards independent political action. The basis for organization was not wide enough and this was proven when, in the end, we found ourselves biting our own tail and calling it the FFLP. If I might be permitted a pleasantry, Pepper had peppered, spiced for us the orientation of the Workers Party

in the daily struggles and its labor party activities so highly, that we became dopey and chronic romancers. Then the month of August gave birth to the idea that if the FFLP did not go forward towards a mass labor party, it might metamorphose itself into a mass Communist Party. Either way we'd win, so let's again shout, Hurrah! In other words, the idea was that we could perform the miracle of grabbing a mass Communist party in America without connecting ourselves with masses of workers and permeating them with our ideology.

But the FFLP neither became a mass Communist party nor a mass labor party. A toadstool is what some comrades called it. And having lost out in Chicago we looked for other green fields. Green they were, sure enough. Dakota and the West caught our eye. The industrial East did not move quick enough and so we moved West and grew up with the country. We fell so in love with the farmers that the CI had to tell us that such love was not at all legitimate. And whereas this Northwest had a longing in its heart for LaFollette, and being so hot on the trail of a labor party that we would sniff most any place for one, we got the foolish idea that an alliance with the LaFollette movement might give us a smell. The CI decided it was not the right kind of a smell, this odor of opportunism. So we ran our own Workers Party candidates.

Before last June there was some life in a labor party slogan outside our inflations and extravagancies. A coming Presidential election interested many. This was yesterday. Today we are confronted with the question of whether we shall have another chapter or two or romance, or whether we shall enjoy a little realism. Shall we attempt the organization of another FFLP, an aggregation which pepper termed "a militant, revolutionary party"? (August 1923, *Liberator.*) Shall we again attempt to gather into a fold the insignificant (when compared with the mass of workers) near-relatives and dub it a labor party? These near-relatives of ours we can get at any time for any action we may undertake. But they are wholly inadequate to alone constitute a labor party. Who else can we get at this time for a third attempt? Who else is interested? Who else can we, the Workers Party, interest, what with our FFLP stunt and our St. Paul trick still fresh in the minds of the workers? To again repeat Chicago [July 3-5, 1923] or St. Paul [June 17-19, 1924] would mean nothing but a third debacle and a further loss of the confidence of workers' organizations. Communist political activity, our efforts to move the masses against the state, certainly does not end at the point that the parliamentary united front becomes impossible. To me the labor party slogan is impossible today. We can now approach the workers with other slogans which surely will also culminate in political action, or we are not a Communist party.

We must at least realize that the masses of workers are not as politically advanced as we though they were. They do not seem to be overanxious even to get into and remain in the LaFollette party. The tempo, the decline of American capitalism is not at all abreast of Pepper's imagination. The hoped for political reaction did not materialize. We did not even get a "Left class bloc" for our sweat and money. The degeneration of the "LaFollette revolution" until today even the railroad brotherhoods are not for a third party convention, attests to this backwardness of labor.

I am not one of those that are overly in love with this overemphasis upon the parliamentary united front. I am not against a parliamentary united front, but it constitutes one of the many maneuvers of our party to me, and it may not be a possible maneuver at all times. I do not want to go into this at length, but a crisis of any seriousness in this country may not push the masses towards the ballot box at all. I remember the march of the West Virginia miners [Aug.-Sept. 1921]. Here was a political manifestation which, with Communist leadership, could have netted us im-

portant results. As Communists we certainly cannot hold that only one straight line, the labor party road, is going to lead us to victory. Our united fronts will be as varied as capitalist offensives and the struggles of the workers compel them to be. Today the labor party slogan is dead. There is no possibility of maneuvers in that direction. And if ever again there are, let's hope we engage in them without soft-peddling our principles and pushing to the Right, but by following the method of the United Front tactic to the letter.

The minority position is creating funny angles in the minds of the members of the party. It makes a principle of riding the inertia of past activity. If the labor party maneuver was good yesterday, it is good today, they say. Dialectics has nothing to do with this kind of reasoning. It is also creating a viewpoint that we must have at our elbow at all times a farmer-labor party as an ever present sidekick to our party, in which all sympathizers will find temporary heaven. Expose the LaFollette party where the remnants of the Farmer-Labor Party are now at home and tell them that is not a good place to live, and so get recruits for the Farmer-Labor Party and then expose the latter by informing these same elements that they are even not yet at home to get members for our party. This seems to be the ideally mechanical, but impossible, united front conception of the minority. The viewpoint that seems present in certain quarters that a farmer-labor party should be had to afford legal protection to our membership must also be deprecated.

As one originally opposed to the LaFollette alliance, I feel that the majority position is a turn to the Left. It is not sectarian, but steps in the direction of a realization of the actual possibilities of any united front we may make, and a willingness to more accurately evaluate the economic conditions and the resultant reaction of the masses of workers and exploited farmers to these conditions. It means to me that we are at last going to give the Workers Party its rightful place in our maneuvers to emphasize it as the only militant revolutionary party, to give it backbone so that in the future we will not again commit the errors of the past.

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