
St. Paul — June 17th.

by James P. Cannon

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A city and a date — St. Paul, June 17th — represent at the present time the central point around which all the forces of the awakening industrial workers and poor farmers are organizing. The great national farmer-labor convention called by the joint action of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, and practically all other existing bona fide farmer-labor organizations, will meet in St. Paul on June 17. Neither the city nor the date is accidental. They, as well as all the other facts about this convention, which distinguish it from the July 4th convention of the CPPA [Conference for Progressive Political Action] at Cleveland, have reasons for their being which arise from class relations and the present stage of development of the class struggle.†

The Northwest Politically Awake.

It is in the Northwest, especially in Minnesota, that the masses of workers and farmers have made the greatest advancement in political life. Their political development has already reached the point of definite organization and a degree of success, even, in the elections. Practically the whole labor movement of Minnesota is participating in the affairs of the Farmer-La-

bor Party.‡ More than that, the bulk of the trade unions have advanced to the point of leading in the organization of the Farmer-Labor Federation, an organization within the Farmer-Labor Party which aims to put it on a definite foundation of workers' and farmers' economic organizations, and control it in this way. It is natural, therefore — one might almost say inevitable — that the other sections of the American labor movement which are striving towards an independent party should turn towards St. Paul and look upon it as the logical center for the crystallization of the national movement. The date of the convention, before the Republican convention will be adjourned and before the Democratic convention will be convened, illustrates the determination to act there without regard to the decisions of these two conventions of the capitalist parties.

Those officials and leaders in the ranks of the labor and farmer movements who are trying to head off the sentiment among the rank and file workers for an independent party of their own, and steer it back into the old parties of the big capitalists, or, failing that, into a third party of the petty bourgeoisie, lost no time in opening fire on the St. Paul convention. They turned against it just as naturally and automati-

†- The Socialist Party of America and the Workers Party of America were at this time attempting to implement identical strategies via different organizations. Both parties envisioned a “federated” Labor Party based on the very successful British model, in which constituent organizations (such as the SPA and WPA) might affiliate with the larger umbrella group while retaining their organizational identity and independence. Despite this unity of vision, the SPA and WPA worked actively at cross purposes with one another, the Socialists attempting to steer the Conference for Progressive Political Action (a group which prohibited Workers Party members from participation) down the Labor Party road, while the Workers Party, disdainful of the Socialists’ strange bedfellows of the conservative railway unions and the Progressive Party, attempted to achieve the very same result steering the Farmer-Labor Parties and their union backers. Ultimately both groups failed in their efforts, with the trade unionists concerned rejecting participation in either organization. Both the SPA and WPA abandoned the Labor Party strategy in the second half of 1924.

‡- Indeed, the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party outlived all of its brethren parties operating in other states, ending its independent existence by merging with the Democratic Party to form the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party only in 1944.

cally as the conscious and awakened workers and poor farmers turned towards it. The St. Paul convention and all its surroundings — the city, the date, the participants, the program, and the determined spirit of it — stamp it unmistakably as a real and genuine convention of workers and farmers bent on organizing an independent political party on class lines. The \$10,000-a-year labor leaders do not want such a party. That is why they are fighting the St. Paul convention.

The widespread revolt of the masses of workers and farmers against the Teapot Dome government is taking a number of forms and showing various manifestations which can only be understood if they are analyzed from the standpoint of class relations and the class struggle. One question especially arises in the minds of many workers. It goes something like this: What is the difference between these two gatherings and what is the reason for the split between them? Why the devil don't they all get together into one convention? And why do I have to be in favor of one and not of both?

The answer to this question is that between the two conventions there are basic differences of composition, purpose, and viewpoint. The two conventions are not striving towards the same goal. That is the reason why they exist separately. An analysis of the makeup and actions of the two bodies makes this very clear.

CPPA Against Rank and File.

The Conference for Progressive Political Action only talks vaguely about independent political action but, in practice, participates in and supports the capitalist parties. It is true that among many of the workers who have been following the CPPA there is a decided sentiment for a Labor Party, but this sentiment does not exist among the leaders of the CPPA. They play the part of "lightning rods." They pose as favoring independent action only as a concession to the sentiment of their followers, in order to catch it and

direct it into the ground. Their "sympathy" for the idea of a labor party is a disguise to hide their actual allegiance to the capitalist parties. These "leaders" of labor cannot lead a fight to form a working class party because they do not have a working class point of view. They do not live like the workers and they do not think like the workers.

Moreover there will be no chance for the rank and file workers who want a Labor Party in spite of the officials to make a fight for it at the Cleveland convention. It is a convention of leaders and officials. The rank and file is not welcome there. Local unions are not admitted. City central bodies have only one vote. Local organizations of farmers are not invited. The International unions, which will be represented by their bureaucratic and reactionary officials, together with some national organizations of farmers, businessmen, liberals, and the traitor Socialist Party, have drawn up a set of rules and apportioned the voting in the convention in such a way as to make it absolutely proof against rank and file interference with their plans. It is needless to add that the Workers Party is not invited to Cleveland.† The Workers Party has been leading the fight for a real class party of workers and farmers, and it could not be expected that those who oppose this idea would invite it to their gathering. If the Workers Party were admitted to the Cleveland convention, the game of the treacherous leaders would be brought out into the open and exposed. If Communists were in the convention they would press the labor traitors to the wall, and organize a fight against their treachery in the convention itself.

St. Paul of and for Real Workers.

The St. Paul convention, on the other hand, is a convention of the rank and file. It is committed in advance to the program of putting up independent farmer-labor candidates in the coming election regardless of the decisions of either the Republican or Demo-

†- It is correct that the Workers Party of America was not invited to the 1924 convention of the Conference for Progressive Political Action. By way of contrast, each and every state organization of the Socialist Party of America was allotted two delegates, the same as state branch organizations of the CPPA itself. Had the two radical American political parties managed to patch up their animosity long enough to work together for their common vision, the infusion of Workers Party delegates would have provided sufficient votes to the Socialists to transform the CPPA into a federated Labor Party. Such a circumstance would have done nothing to change the basic political fact that the unions — who did not desire an independent political party, but rather sought to use the primaries of the Republican and Democratic Parties to elect "labor friendly" candidates — would have bolted the resulting organization en masse.

cratic parties. The bodies which constituted the preliminary conferences and issued the call for the convention consisted of seven already existing farmer-labor parties including the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, to which last the Communists of the Workers Party are affiliated. The class idea was the dominant idea in the conference and the sentiment for welding the whole movement into one national Farmer-Labor Party on June 17th is strong and growing among the participants in the arrangements for the convention. That both these factors will grow stronger there can be no doubt. The presence in the convention of the Communists, who stand squarely and fight aggressively for the organization of a national party and the domination in it of the class idea, is the best guarantee of this.

This St. Paul convention holds out tremendous possibilities. If we succeed in our aims there and crystallize in one body the revolting elements of the workers and tenant and mortgaged farmers, formulating a class program and establishing an aggressive leadership, the political revolt of the oppressed masses will move forward with giant strides. A successful convention at St. Paul on June 17th will mean that the workers as a distinct class, in alliance with the poor farmers, have stepped onto the political stage in America for the first time. Such an event will have a profound influence, not only upon America but upon the entire world.

We are not alone in this appraisal of the significance of June 17. The enemies of the independent working class political movement are alive to the dynamic possibilities of this convention in St. Paul. They have commenced to fire a tremendous volley of denunciation and misrepresentation against it. The capitalist press, and that part of the labor press which serves the capitalists, are fighting the St. Paul conven-

tion with all their power. Their aim is to defeat the rank and file movement for an independent class party, to steer the workers back into the capitalist parties, or into a third party dominated by the petty bourgeoisie. There is no mystery in the fact that they single out participation by the Communists in the June 17th convention for particular attack. The presence of the Communists — the driving force in the genuine labor party movement — assures that a real fight will be made for the formation of a national party on a class basis, dominated by the workers and poor farmers. This is what the capitalists and their labor agents fear the most. This is why they are making such a fight against the Communists in connection with this convention.

St. Paul Means Class Struggle.

For the conscious and militant workers and tenant and mortgaged farmers, the fight for the St. Paul convention is the most important question on the order of the day. This convention, and the struggle for it, concentrates on one point, for the time being, the whole struggle of the rank and file of exploited labor against the capitalists, the capitalist government and the agents of the capitalists in the labor movement. It represents the beginning of the union between the workers of the cities and the farms — which is an indispensable prerequisite to the final victory. The size and strength of the St. Paul convention, and the extent to which the conscious class elements dominate and shape it, will be the best and most reliable measure of the political development of the exploited workers and farmers of America. The militant trade unionists have to realize all these facts and make the fight for the June 17th convention the biggest issue in the labor movement.

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