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# The Workers Party and the Federated Farmer-Labor Party.

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The workers and farmers of the United States have at last formed their first mass party — the Federated Farmer-Labor Party.

Before the Chicago Convention, I wrote the following in the July issue of the *Liberator*:

“The Labor Party movement is a political earthquake of the first magnitude. The American capitalist class issued its Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. The day of the Declaration of Independence of the American working class will be the day of the founding of its independent political party. July 3 and 4, 1923, the date of the Convention of the Farmer-Labor Party, can be in history the date of the Declaration of Independence of the American working class; however, that Convention will not be the *end*, but rather the *beginning* of the formation of a genuine Labor Party.”

Our judgment was correct. The constitution and program of the new Federated Farmer-Labor Party are the Declaration of Independence of the American working class.

The Declaration of Independence of the middle class at the Congress of 1776 declared that whenever any form of government became destructive of life, liberty and happiness, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it and to institute a new government. The program adopted in the Convention of July 3, 1923 proclaims the same right to independence for the exploited workers and farmers: “To free the farmer and industrial workers from the greedy exploitation of those who now rule in this country, and to win for them the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness which their exploiters deny them.”

The Declaration of Independence of 1776 would have remained an insignificant scrap of paper if the *masses* of the American middle class with their *militant determination* to free themselves from the exploitation of the British monarchy had not stood behind

it. The Declaration of Independence of the workers and farmers in 1923 would remain an insignificant scrap of paper if it did not have behind it the masses of 600,000 workers and farmers who were represented at the Chicago convention. The Declaration of Independence of 1776 could become a reality, only through years of revolutionary war. The declaration of independence of 1923 can only become a reality through years of intensive conscious class struggle.

## The First Mass Party of American Workers and Farmers.

The real significance of the foundation of the new Federated Farmer-Labor Party can be measured from two points of view. First, are there really masses standing behind the new party? Second, is the new party really guided by a revolutionary spirit?

The new party is a real mass party. Under the present conditions here in the United States, 616,000 workers and farmers means a real mass movement. The comparisons speak. The American Federation of Labor has no more than 3,500,000 members. The Socialist Party has only 12,000, the Workers Party only 20,000 members, and the Socialist Party in its best times did not have much more than 100,000 members. And we should not forget that these 616,000 workers and farmers are not merely formally connected with the new Party through high officials, but through rank and file representation, through local unions and city bodies. The new Party contains 50,000 mine workers, 10,000 machinists, 60,000 clothing workers, 30,000 ladies' garment workers, 7,000 carpenters, 10,000 metal workers, 7,000 food workers. The mighty West Virginia State Federation of Labor with 87,000

members, the great Central Labor Bodies of Buffalo with 40,000, Detroit (40,000), Minneapolis (20,000), Butte (12,000), all declared for the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. The trades council of Herrin (11,000), the Minnesota Railroad Shop Crafts Legislative Committee (15,000), and the twelve Street and Railway Carmen's Organizations (8,000 are represented in the party) with their tens of thousands of members. The Nebraska Progressive Party with 40,00 members, the Los Angeles Labor Party with 11,000 members, the Wisconsin Society of Equity (10,000), the Western Progressive Farmers' League of Washington, the state organizations of the former Farmer-Labor Party of Washington, Ohio, Kentucky, California, Illinois and Wisconsin represent in addition tens of thousands of workers and farmers. *Never before in American history did a political party of workers and farmers have such mighty masses behind it.* Karl Marx said once that force plays the greatest role in history; but the idea can also become a force, when it takes hold of the masses. For the first time in the history of the American labor movement we see that the idea of the class struggle is taking hold, not of a narrow minority of militants, but of the masses.

### **It is a Revolutionary Party!**

But that is precisely the great question — whether the new Party is really the party of an idea, if it is really the *party of the idea of the class struggle?*

The Federated Farmer-Labor Party is not a Communist Party. Its program is not Communist. Its whole structure is not a structure of a Communist Party. It is not an organization of individuals, but a bloc of organizations. The overwhelming majority of its members are not Communists — they are not as yet followers of the idea of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and government of soviets. They still have democratic illusions in many respects.

But the new party is, nevertheless, a militant revolutionary party.

The history of its birth is the best guarantee of its revolutionary spirit. It is not like the British Labor Party; it was not organized from the top by high officials, but from the bottom, by the rank and file. It does not comprise the entire working class, but only the left wing of the labor movement. It comprises the

workers who have lost their illusions, not only over the capitalist Republican and Democratic parties, but also over Gompers' non-partisan policy, and Johnston's progressive political action. And it comprises farmers who are even more exploited than the workers, and have lost their illusions not only over LaFollette and Ford, but also over the Nonpartisan League and the various grange organizations.

The program of the new party is not Communist, but it contains several fundamentally revolutionary points.

First, the new party says openly that it is organized for the class struggle against the capitalist.

Second, that the enemy is not only the individual capitalist, but the mighty central committee of the whole capitalist class — the government.

Third, the new party states clearly and sharply that its goal is the capture of political power by the workers and farmers.

Fourth, it breaks with the illusion of gradual reformistic nationalization and says openly, that the workers and farmers must first capture power and possess governmental authority before they can institute nationalization and public ownership.

Fifth, the new party declares war against mortgages and tenantry and demands that the land shall belong to its users.

Sixth, and highest guarantee that the new party does and will remain a revolutionary party, is the inclusion of the Workers Party. The Workers Party was the driving and unifying force in the July 3rd convention for forming a Federated Farmer-Labor Party. The Workers Party will also be in the future a driving force within the new party, so that it shall serve the exploited workers and farmers constantly better and on an ever greater front.

### **The Great Collapse of Illusions.**

The new Federated Farmer-Labor Party is not a gift fallen from heaven, but is the result of hard struggles within the labor movement. The great majority of the American working class no longer believes today in the non-partisan policy of Gompers. Great masses are also disillusioned over the progressive political action swindle of Johnston. But Gompers and Johnston still have the machinery of organization.

Through the power of their machinery they could prevent the great majority of the working class from sending their delegates to the July 3rd Convention. For that reason, the July 3rd Convention remained only a convention of the militant wing of the American working class. Only those elements came to Chicago which have definitely broken with Gompers' "non-partisan" ideology, and with Johnston's "progressive" ideology. But even the July 3rd convention itself did not have a free road from the beginning, for the formation of a genuine farmer-labor party. The July 3rd convention itself had to fight out an internal battle with the remnant of the officials who remained in its midst. The leaders of the old Farmer-Labor Party and the officials of the Chicago Federation of Labor obstructed the formation of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. In the past they have waged bitter fights against the non-partisan policy of Gompers. They even broke with Johnston's Cleveland Conference. In December 1922, after the Cleveland Conference Fitzpatrick, Nockels, Buck and Brown made a split *for* the Labor Party; but in July 1923, in the Chicago Convention, they made the split *against* the Labor Party. They were militant elements in the past, but they are anti-militant elements for the present, and will be so most likely in the future.

What is the reason of this great metamorphosis?

They are being pressed from two sides. From below by the Communists who are becoming stronger and stronger and who no longer content themselves with fine phrases. And from above, there is the pressure of the Gompers machine, which becomes ever stronger, in the same measure as the Communists are becoming more dangerous from below. Gompers' hunt of the reds in Seattle, Minneapolis, Detroit and Chicago, the threat to take away the charter from these city bodies, has created a dilemma for the officials of the Chicago Federation of Labor who at the same time are the dominating elements in the old Farmer-Labor Party. They had to choose — either they would go together with the really militant elements, against Gompers, or against the militant elements, with Gompers. They have chosen Samuel Gompers, but not without an internal spiritual struggle. A few weeks ago they still believed that they were the enemies of Gompers; and not only the rank and file, but they themselves were overwhelmed as they discovered that they stood

in the same camp with Gompers. A few weeks ago, Fitzpatrick was still for the Labor Party, and for admitting the Workers Party into it, for amalgamation and for defense of the Communists in the Bridgman, Michigan case. He became deconverted — from a Paul he once more became a Saul. He was returned from the New Testament of militancy, to the Old Testament of Samuel Gompers. It is really a pity about Fitzpatrick. He has merited much in the labor movement, and was a good leader. The old saying is, that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. And we can say that the road to revolution is paved with the political corpses of well-intentioned leaders.

### **Farmer-Labor Party and Workers Party.**

The 650 delegates of the July 3rd Convention had already broken with Gompers, and with Johnston before they came to Chicago, and in Chicago they found themselves before the bitter necessity of breaking also with Fitzpatrick. The officials of the old Farmer-Labor Party and the Chicago Federation of Labor from the very beginning blocked the formation of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. The Workers Party was forced to take up the fight against them and for the idea of the formation of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. From the beginning there were two organized forces in the Convention — the right, composed of the officials of the old Farmer-Labor Party and the Chicago Federation of Labor, for the vague phrase of independent political action and against the immediate formation of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, and the left, the Workers Party, demanding the creation of a body for the wandering soul of independent political action and calling for the transformation of the phrase into an organization. The Fitzpatrick bloc had only a very small minority in the Convention, not more than 50 or 60 delegates. The Workers Party was also in the minority. Through various militant unions and other labor organizations it had not quite 200 delegates. From the first minute to the close of the Convention we see a continual hard fight between the officials of the old Farmer-Labor Party, and the Workers Party, for the soul of the other 400 delegates. The inner story of the whole convention was but the bitter fight of those two conscious political groups — the small group of officials against organizing the La-

bor Party, and the Workers Party for creating the Federated Farmer-Labor Party.

The old officials had all the advantages on their side. It was they who have called the Convention of July 3rd. They had the entire machinery in their hands. They were the old well-known leaders with popular names, and with great past achievements. The Workers Party was only halfheartedly invited to the Convention, and was handicapped by the fear, on the part of many delegates, of the Communist red devil. The Workers Party had all the disadvantages in the struggle, but it had one advantage. It represented the idea of historical necessity. It represented the need and aspiration of the masses. It was representative of the interests of the working class. It represented the idea of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. The idea of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party won out, and it is to the great historical credit of the Workers Party that the July 3rd Convention at last organized the first mass party of the workers and farmers in the United States.

### **Frontal and Flank Attacks.**

The Workers Party was not only representative of a great idea, but it also had the good elastic tactics which succeeded in destroying the prejudices of the delegates, and winning over the overwhelming majority to the realization of that idea.

What was the tactical situation? The officials of the old Farmer-Labor Party tried at the beginning to hide their real intentions. They did not speak openly against the formation of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, but agitated for independent political action. They said the Convention should wait until the roast pigeon of international unions would fly into their mouths. But meanwhile all should enter into the old Farmer-Labor Party, but only the Workers Party should remain outside, and should be connected with it only through an affiliation committee. With this affiliation committee these officials wanted to create a sort of Ellis Island for the Workers Party in order to test it "physically, mentally and morally," before admitting it into the respectable society of the high and higher officials. The tactic of the officials at the beginning was not to attack openly the idea of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, but to try to annihilate the champion of the idea of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party

through flank attacks. They did not dare to attack the idea of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, and therefore attacked the Workers Party. They knew that the defeat of the Workers Party meant the defeat of the idea of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. The first flank attack was the question of affiliation. They proposed that every delegate should be seated in the convention except national and international groups, in reality, therefore, all except the Workers Party. Their second flank attack was when they saw that they could no longer prevent the creation of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. They then made the proposal that the new party should bar from its ranks all groups aiming to overthrow the government by force and violence.

The Workers Party had to use every means to force the officials of the old Farmer-Labor Party to declare their real intentions, to force them to speak openly against the idea of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. The Workers Party had to prevent the flank attack of the officials which stirred up the prejudices of many delegates and had to force them to a direct frontal attack against the idea of the Labor Party, where it was certain that the overwhelming majority of the delegates would declare themselves against the officials. Summed up in a single phrase, the tactic of the Farmer-Labor Party officials was to make a flank attack against the Workers Party, in order thereby to prevent the formation of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. The tactic of the Workers Party was to force the officials into a frontal attack against the idea of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, and thus to reduce them to an insignificant minority.

The officials of the old Farmer-Labor Party wanted to isolate the Workers Party in order to paralyze the driving force toward a Federated Farmer-Labor Party. The Workers Party had to isolate the group of officials in order that the Federated Party could be organized.

### **The First Battle.**

Four great tactical battles took place in the Convention, and in all four the Workers Party remained victor. Their first battle developed over the report of the credentials committee. Though the credentials committee was composed of members of the old Farmer-Labor Party, it presented a motion that every

delegate be seated in the Convention. The Workers Party had an agreement with the with the old Farmer-Labor Party, that in the narrower Farmer-Labor Party convention, only those delegates be admitted who represented such organizations which even before the Convention belonged to the old Farmer-Labor Party. The officials violated this agreement when they moved the amendment, against the motion of the credentials committee, that not only bona fide Farmer-Labor Party delegates, but also delegates of all local unions and city bodies should be seated, and that only national and international groups should remain outside. The Workers Party naturally had to take up the fight against this tactical move of the officials. First, the cunning of the officials would have isolated the Workers Party from the big mass of delegates. Second, the convention of the old Farmer-Labor Party would have rendered superfluous the big conference for the formation of the new Federated Farmer-Labor Party, which was to follow. We had to fight against allowing new wine being poured into old skin in which the old wine had already turned sour. The delegates of the Workers Party explained clearly and frankly that this move was one to prevent the formation of the Federated Party; and the Convention, with the exception of the officials, declared unanimously for permitting all the delegates to stay, and for transforming the narrow convention of the old Farmer-Labor Party to the general conference of the new Labor Party. The first attack was repulsed.

### **The Second Battle.**

The second battle developed over the report of the organization committee. The organization committee was composed of representatives of all the various groups of organizations. Each group nominated its own representatives, and the Convention elected the nominees. The organization committee was a real expression of the will and the political views of the Convention. And this organization committee almost unanimously (of twenty-nine members only three officials of the old Farmer-Labor Party voted in the negative) brought in a resolution before the Convention, that a Federated Farmer-Labor Party be organized immediately, and that a National Executive Committee of this Party be elected by the Convention. Fitz-

patrick, Buck, Brown and other officials of the old narrow Farmer-Labor Party made one speech after another against the immediate formation of the Federated Party. They spoke for independent political action, just as Johnston and the leaders of the Socialist Party spoke in Cleveland for progressive political action. But it became evident that independent political action to them meant simply independence from the idea of a Labor Party, just as for Johnston and Hillquit progressive political action was only retrogressive action back to Gompers. The great task of all honest adherents of the Labor Party was to show that the conditions and masses are ripe for the Labor Party, and that only the officials are not ripe. An old farmer said bitterly, "The time is ripe, overripe, the time is rotten." It was an historical moment. It was an elementary outburst of the longing of the farmers and workers for a real Labor Party, a representative of their class interests. Only those politically blind could assert that the time is not ripe for a labor party, after the fights of the summer of 1922, after the Daugherty injunction, after the bankruptcy of the farmers, and on the eve of a new economic depression. In a storm of enthusiasm, 600 delegates voted against 40, that is, the whole Convention voted almost unanimously, for the immediate formation of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. With this decision, the frontal attack of the leaders against the idea of the Labor Party was repulsed.

### **The Third Battle.**

The third battle was fought over the report of the agrarian committee. This committee was elected through a caucus of all the former delegates at the Convention. The committee unanimously adopted a program which it presented to the Convention. Besides excellent revolutionary demands this program retained a number of points on money and taxation, which were theoretically confused. The Workers Party was in a difficult situation. It attempted to fight in the agrarian committee against theoretical confusion, but it could not break the prejudice of the farmers. We had to decide whether we were to continue the correct Marxist theory and isolate ourselves from the masses of farmers, or to accept the incorrect theory and ally the farmers with us. As good Marxists we chose the latter. The confused theory over the money question

is an old heritage in American politics. The problem of “cheap money,” and of “good money” was always an object of confusion, but it was always, also, the slogan of rebellion. Since the times of the Greenback Party and the Populist Party, the money question has been the hobbyhorse of the rebellious farmers. The Workers Party had to accept the confusion of the farmers, so that it could win the rebellion of the farmers as an ally. It was one of the most illuminating episodes of the Convention, and the best proof that the Workers Party had learned to manoeuvre, when a delegate of the Proletarian Party arose and declared that they as Communists could not vote for the confused, non-Marxian agrarian resolution. The farmers immediately became restless and suspicious. They had the holy and deep resolution that their resolution on taxation and money is the only remedy for the bankrupt farmers, and now they were told that this was incompatible with correct Communism. There arose a dangerous situation. There sprang up the menace that the farmers would declare: “the Communists are against our program. To hell with the Communists.” But the Workers Party found the right tactic — the tactic of a party of the masses against the tactic of a sect. The delegates of the Workers Party declared that in certain respects they are not agreed theoretically with this program of the farmers, but that practically they wanted to accept it, precisely because it is a program of farmers, and they wish to go hand in hand with the exploited farmers all along the line. Through this declaration, the whole picture changed. The Workers Party won the confidence and friendship of the farmers. This victory of the Workers Party was so much the finer and more valuable because it was not only a victory over the mistrust of the farmers, but a victory over the past sectarianism of the Workers Party itself. The Proletarian Party showed itself a genuine sectarian group. It was ridiculed and it deserved to be ridiculed. But we should not forget that we ridicule thereby our own past. Someone at the Convention remarked very aptly that it is remarkable that the Workers Party which hardly a year ago came out of the woods of Bridgman, Michigan, has so quickly learned the elastic manoeuvring within a mass party.

### **The Fourth Battle.**

The fourth battle was waged over a statement of the old Farmer-Labor Party group. This statement declared against the formation of the new Federated Farmer-Labor Party, demanded that the Convention should continue the old Farmer-Labor Party without change, and should bar all such organizations which adhere to the Communist International or which advocate the overthrow of the government by force and violence. The officials of the Farmer-Labor Party tried by every means to frighten the delegates with Moscow and the red devil. But the counterrevolutionary phrase had no longer any effect. In Cleveland even the Farmer-Labor Party delegates had declared that the force and violence stuff in Keating’s mouth was nothing else than Burns’ most vicious weapon against the entire labor movement. Now in Chicago they had fallen so low that they aped Keating’s aping of Burns. But the Chicago Convention was not the Cleveland Conference. It was not a conclave of officials, but a gathering of the rank and file who hate Daugherty’s Burns, and have contempt for the smooth-tongued phrase-mongers who tried to translate Burns’ language into the language of the working class. At the end of the debate, there were 550 votes against 50 to table the motion of the officials. With this, the last flank attack against the idea of a militant labor party was beaten.

### **The Communist Party and the Interests of the Working Class.**

In all these fights the leader in the fighting was the Workers Party. But it would be a mistake to believe that the Workers Party fought for itself. The Workers Party did not fight for itself, but for the idea of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. It would also be a mistake to say that the Workers Party organized the new Federated Farmer-Labor Party. The new Federated Farmer-Labor Party was organized by the hundreds of farmer and worker delegates themselves. The Workers Party played only the role of midwife. And just as little as Workers Party dominated the convention, just so little does it control the new Party. The Party is controlled by farmers and workers directly.

The Workers Party has worked so little for its own selfish party interest, and so much for the interest

of the working and farmer classes, that its entire tactic was a tactic of unification. It fought against its own isolation, because that would have been isolation of the idea of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. The tactic of the Workers Party in all the battles, was to extend front of the adherents of the Labor Party idea. In the first battle, on the question of affiliation, they extended the front of the Labor Party adherents, through solidification of local unions. In the second fight of vague phrase versus concrete party organization, they extended the fighting front through alliance with the idea of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. In the third fight over the agrarian program, they extended the front through winning the confidence of the farmers. In the fourth battle over force and violence, they extend the fighting front still further by winning the left wing and the center of the old Farmer-Labor Party itself. This internal revolt within the old Farmer-Labor Party which isolated the right wing grouped about Fitzpatrick, likewise isolated the right wing definitely in the whole convention. Except for two score of officials, the whole of Farmer-Labor Party joined the new Federated Party.

The Workers Party has shown itself a real com-

munist party precisely because it did not allow itself to be guided by sectarian party interests, but by the interests of the entire working class. As the *Communist Manifesto* had already said:

“The Communists have no interests separate and apart from those of the working class as a whole.

They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the working class movement.

The Communists are distinguished from the other working class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the workers of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front interests of the entire working class, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the capitalists has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand practically the most advanced and resolute section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically they have over the great mass of the working class the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the working class movement.

The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other working class parties; the formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of capitalist supremacy, conquest of political power by the working class.”

*Transcribed by Mitch Abidor.*

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