
John Fitzpatrick Greeted Delegates: Room for All Useful Citizens in the Labor Party of US, He Says. [Speech in Chicago — July 11, 1920]

by Robert M. Buck

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Unsigned report attributed to editor Robert Buck.

John Fitzpatrick, President of the Chicago Federation of Labor and Labor Party candidate for US Senator, made the address to the delegates at the opening session of the Labor Party convention [July 11, 1920]. He explained how the Labor Party had come into being after years of disappointment and failure on the part of labor to secure legislation from the old political parties. He also dispelled the idea scattered broadcast by the kept press that the Labor Party was organized for union labor alone.

He said there was a place in the Labor Party for every man and woman in the United States performing useful service.

Mr. Fitzpatrick said that the sadly exploited United States workers need not waste sympathy upon the citizens of Russia and Ireland as both of these countries were demonstrating to the world that they knew how to govern themselves. Ireland, he said, is standing up for its demands in the face of the whole British empire.

Mr. Fitzpatrick spoke in part as follows:

From Friends to Enemies.

For years and years the organized workers, and the organizations, followed the old routine and the old program, and in their political activities they went to the Republican Party and to the Democratic Party, year in and year out. It didn't make any difference whether the Democratic Party or the Republican Party was in power in the city or in the state, they went there with their program, and they got their promises, only to find that these promises were shattered, destroyed, and never fulfilled. And after some 25 or 30 or more years of activity of that kind, Labor found that its score was "zero," and the other fellow had taken everything that

he wanted. Now, the Republican and Democratic Parties manipulate or operate a shrewd game. They have been able to so divide the workers and the people who are interested in doing things on the face of the earth, as to keep them hopelessly divided.

Take for instance with our Legislature. We would elect men on the Republican ticket, and on the Democratic ticket, to the state legislature. For what purpose? For making laws to serve the interests of the men and women and children of this state/ that is what we hoped for. That was our purpose and our intention. But let's see how the thing worked out. When they got down into Springfield, a situation developed there, and I think it is not unlike the situation that has been developed in almost every other legislature, but I cannot criticize legislatures of other states. I can only criticize the legislature of the state of Illinois and this is what happened here.

Our Jackpot Legislature.

Our legislature became known as the jackpot legislature. What a sad indictment that is against the men and women of this great commonwealth. Why? Because it bought and sold and bartered the rights and interests of men and women and children, and delivered the goods to the financial, commercial, and industrial pirates of this state.

For years they had us hopelessly divided, and they hoped to be able to continue that. And when the Chicago Federation of Labor after going up against this situation all of these years understood that thing then they knew that a new day in politics must be brought into the situation, if we intended to smash the old regime and to bring that new day that we hoped for to the people. So, the declaration was made that a labor party would be started, and we asked the rank and file of the membership of the organizations affiliated with the Chicago Federation of Labor what was their conclusions in this matter, and by an overwhelming vote the trade unions of the city of Chicago authorized their representatives to proceed to the formation of a labor party that would be organized by the people who hoped for this better day and would be actually and really responsive to the wishes of the men, women, and children of the state.

Grew Step by Step.

Mr. Fitzpatrick told how 189 organizations in Chicago had answered the first call to establish a Labor Party and how in spite of old party control of election machinery the party had been accredited with 57,000 votes in the city election after a few weeks organization; how the Illinois Federation of Labor had sent out a state call resulting in the formation of a state Labor Party. He also went into detail explaining how this idea had grown until last November when the 1st National Convention was called to order. Continuing, he said:

It met in Chicago in this hall last November [1919], with the result that between 1200 and 1500 delegates from all parts of the country assembled, some 35 states being represented, and numerous organizations were here speaking in behalf of their organizations, participating in the effort to form a new party. In that convention there were international organizations represented, state federations of labor, city central bodies, farmers' organizations, and a great number of others that we can't recall to mind; but there was the groundwork and the National Labor Party was launched.

Now this convention has been called and we are here now not as representatives of ourselves, not speaking our own individual mind on this situation, but after mature and deliberate consideration by the workers in these various organizations and localities, we are selected as their representatives to come here and commune together and devise some way whereby we can stand together and present the position taken by these workers in this demand for a new day and stand solidly together until we accomplish that purpose.

Who Defends Old Parties?

In Chicago, one of the old parties had its convention and they elected their standard bearers in this coming contest. And where is there the man or woman who is free to stand up and express themselves, that is going to say that they can stand for the platform or the candidates of the Republican Party? You can't do it. It is a denial of everything that the American people have demanded and spoken for.

Then you turn over and you go to San Francisco, and here you find the Democratic Party meeting in convention, declaring their program, and electing their standard bearers. And what does that mean to the people of the United States? Where is there a man or woman that is going to rise now and say that they can accept the pleasures of the Democratic Party, after the way the Democratic Party has permitted its representatives to betray the people in the last 4 years.

Here Mr. Fitzpatrick explained how Gov. Cox had used his influence during the steel strike [Sept. 22, 1919-Jan. 8, 1920], by sending in troops to awe

the strikers and had been instrumental in having the mayor of Canton, O., removed from office because the latter insisted the strikers had rights of free speech and assemblage. Similar outrages upon labor were made under Cox's administration at Youngstown, O., where workers are not permitted to carry an American flag in a parade.

All Agree Something Wrong.

We have laid the foundation of this Labor Party. I think it represents the hopes and aspirations of the workers generally. There are a great many other folks who are having the same hopes and aspirations, but they don't know how to light; they want to, in their own way, or some other way; and a great deal of explanation and a great deal of definition and other things have got to be entered into before we will be able to harmonize whatever differences there are between us. I think that when we really get down to the basis of this situation in which this government is at present, we are all agreed. There is no difference. I can't find any difference. I talked to representatives of these various groups and when you really get down to the basis, we have all got the same program. So, if we are not any farther apart than that, then isn't it right that we hold the view, and we express the view, that there is nothing on the face of the earth now to prevent right-thinking men and women, the hand and brain workers of the United States, those who render useful service, that they cannot be prevented from doing what? From taking the reins of government out of the hands of the — not American financial, but out of the hands of the International financial pirates.

The control of the affairs of this nation has gone beyond the control of Wall Street, or a situation of that kind. It is now international.

Trying to Save Others.

I come in contact with the representatives and the groups from all parts of this country and all parts of the world, and there are some great bit situations on the face of the earth today in which they are earnestly interested. They think that we ought to be ready to leave our occupation, whatever work we are engaged in at the present time, and go and see that that other situation somewhere on the face of the earth is attended to, and attended to properly, and I have no quarrel with them.

I only wish that wherever there is a bad spot, wherever there is a spot on the face of the earth that the rights of men, women, and children are denied, that we could assemble a sufficient number of men and women to wipe out that spot, and bring into being a situation of good.

So they tell us about Russia. Russia, my Heavens! "Get a system," "Get some cooperation from the people of the United States." What has Russia done? Let's see what they have done. For 700 years they labored under a monarchy, and then they made up their mind that was long enough, that they must take that monarchy and shoot it into the garbage can. And then that they would set up a government of what? That the United States is going to tell them how to

do it?

Can't Save Ourselves.

We would be very poor instructors, after the job that we permitted in this country. I think if Russia wants assistance or direction, they might very well go over to Ireland, they might get something there.

But Russia has destroyed the situation, and has brought into being a government of the people, representing the people, and which takes into consideration the rights and activities of the people in the way that the Russian people want them taken care of. So, I am not worrying about Russia. Russia has done a tremendous job.

Oh, that the day was only near when the workers in the United States would be able to concentrate their effort and do a job such as Russia has done. (*prolonged cheering and vociferous applause.*)

Now then, the other situation that I had reference to was Ireland. And they tell us that we ought to be losing sleep over here on account of Ireland. Well, I happen to be a Sinn Feiner, and I am not worried about what the people in Ireland are going to do. The people in Ireland have a peculiar knack for a long time of working out their own destiny, and at the present time they are very capable at doing that. You know the situation that exists in Ireland today. In the face of what? In the face of the British Empire.

Irish Defy British Empire.

In the face of the British Empire the Irish people have stood up and set up their own Irish Republic. And that stands there today, in the face of the British Empire. What does your British Empire mean in a situation of that kind? I say to you, that this kind of control that has existed on the face of the earth, either in autocracies or monarchies or empires is gone; that people are going to destroy every vestige of it. And it only needs that we concentrate our intelligence and our activities, and centralize our punch, so that when we deliver it, this control of the United States — you cannot say that it is a monarchy, or that it is an autocracy, or that it is an empire — will cease. It is none of those things. But what is it? It is worse than that.

A Job to Do at Home.

Here is a group of greedy, avaricious financial labor baiters and oppressors, trying to exploit the people. They have got control of the United States, and it is our duty, just as Russia has taken over the operation of their own country, and their own government; as the Irish have taken over the control of their own country, and set up their own republic — then so, also, it is our duty and responsibility to proceed to wrest this government out of the hands that it is in at the present time, and bring it back to the people, so that it will serve the people.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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