

The Comintern and the Farmer-Labor Party

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER.

In their thesis the minority make the claim that their farmer-labor party policy has the support of the Communist International. By a series of evasions, half-truths, and downright misrepresentations, they get around the fact that conditions have greatly changed since the Comintern O. K.'d our farmer-labor party policy, and that in the light of the new conditions a new statement on this policy by the C. I. is necessary and will be had in the near future. The substance of the changed conditions is that when the Comintern consented to a farmer-labor party policy for the Workers Party, there was in existence a mass movement making toward the formation of a farmer-labor party. This mass movement is no longer at hand. It has been amalgamated or absorbed into the LaFollette movement. Thus has been destroyed the basis of the farmer-labor party policy. It has been made obsolete and its use would be a menace to the Workers Party. So the Comintern will rule when the problem is placed before it in the near future.

From the summer of 1922 until its latest decision, the Comintern has always recognized the principle that in order for the Workers Party to propagate the farmer-labor party slogan there must be a mass movement for such a party. In 1922, it was only when there was shown to be a strong movement amongst the masses for a farmer-labor party that the C. I. first agreed to our labor party policy. This principle has been adhered to since in all the letters and decisions of the C. I. upon this matter. In its recent letter to the Workers Party on the subject of the third party alliance the same principle was enunciated. A key sentence in the decision reads: "In many states farmer-labor parties are springing up." This clearly shows that the decision was based upon the assumption that there was in existence a strong mass movement for a farmer-labor party.

But a clearer indication than this that the Comintern would have the Workers Party advocate the farmer-labor party slogan only if there was a mass movement behind it, occurs farther along in the decision, where the St. Paul convention is dealt with specifically. This section says:

"In case of a split the question of whether or not the Workers Party shall act altogether independently in its own name, in the election campaign, or whether it shall launch a campaign under the name of the farmer-labor party, will depend largely upon whether or not it (the Workers Party) is successful in the split and will depend on how far it maintains contact with the working masses at the June 17 convention."

This part of the decision is a section of an amendment which I submitted to the original draft, and which was adopted in full. It came about this way. As a result of over-optimistic and exaggerated reports of the great masses behind the federated farmer-labor party, the belief existed in Comintern circles that even if there were a split with LaFollette at St. Paul there would still be sentiment enough to make a mass movement for a farmer-labor party. I disputed this vigorously, asserting that only the "third party alliance" could prevent the amalgamation of the farmer-labor movement with the LaFollette movement, inasmuch as both movements were ideologically the same. I argued that if a split took place at St. Paul there would be nothing left to the so-called farmer-labor movement, except the Workers Party and its immediate sympathizers, which would make necessary the abandonment of the farmer-labor party ticket and the placing of W. P. candidates in the field.

Hence, I introduced my amendment, which provided for the Workers Party running independent in the eventuality of such a split as would destroy the mass character of the "class" farmer-labor party movement, as Comrade Ruthenberg calls it. The amendment was immediately accepted. Comrade Zinoviev endorsed it personally, and it was adopted unanimously by the presidium. This shows conclusively that the Comintern considers the farmer-labor party slogan dead unless the masses can be rallied by it. The C. I. never intended and does not intend now that we should struggle behind the farmer-labor party slogan if there are no masses supporting it. The minority proposition of propagating the farmer-labor party slogan in season and out of season, mass movement or no mass movement, is contrary to the whole spirit of all the Comintern decisions on the subject.

Events at the June 17 convention and afterward proved the necessity of the above-mentioned amendment. The split with the LaFollette movement was so deep that there was practically nothing left of the farmer-labor party as a distinct organization. There were no masses to be rallied by the farmer-labor party so, following the Comintern decision to the letter, we dropped the farmer-labor party and put W. P. candidates in the field. Comrade Lovestone bitterly opposed this course, which practically the whole party now recognizes as having been absolutely vital for the welfare of the Workers Party. To have gone thru the campaign under the pale pink flag of the pseudo-national

farmer-labor party, formed at the St. Paul convention, would have been a major disaster for the Workers Party. But Comrade Lovestone was willing that it be done, and he has not since changed his opinion. What matter what happens to the Workers Party so long as his beloved farmer-labor party is kept to the fore? It is Comrade Lovestone's ideas, more than anyone else's, that are incorporated in the minority thesis. He and the rest of the minority, following out their policy, which is the most opportunistic in the history of our party, are for a farmer-labor party regardless of the interests of the Workers Party. Let them deny this as much as they please, nevertheless the fact remains as stated.

In their thesis the minority get far away from the premises as laid down by the Comintern for our labor party policy. They make the formation of a farmer-labor party almost a matter of fundamental Communist tactics. Their thesis, for example, makes this astounding statement: "The slogan 'for a class farmer-labor party' remains our most effective means of agitation for political action on a class basis by the workers and poor farmers." We had thought that the Workers Party was the organization thru which to get "political action on a class basis." But it seems that according to the opportunistic minority the farmer-labor party is just as good, nay, even better. We learn much as the farmer-labor Communists put their ideas into print.

But, altho the minority seek to set up the formation of a farmer-labor party as a sort of sacred Communist duty, nevertheless they cannot altogether ignore the necessity for trying to prove it a mass movement. And with what bizarre results: In their thesis they actually have the brass to tell us that the farmer-labor parties of Washington, Montana, Colorado, South Dakota, and Minnesota, altho they voted for LaFollette, are not of the LaFollette movement. What an absurdity! What desperate straits the minority are in order to get masses for their celebrated "class" farmer labor party. The fact is, as even the veriest tyro knows, these parties are among the highest developed sections of the LaFollette movement. They have broken from the old parties and have definitely formed themselves into a LaFollette third party movement, regardless of what names they may call themselves. The only real difference they have with LaFollette is an organizational one, the question of the immediate formation of a third party.

Have the minority adopted the S. P. conception that the third party is really a "class" farmer-labor party, except for a few trimmings? If not, how can they by any stretch of the imagination list the foregoing parties, especially the Minnesota party, as farmer-labor parties? The minority in their opportunistic hunt for masses to muster behind the dead farmer-labor party slogan, lugged into their service the choicest collection of LaFollette parties in the entire country.

In their thesis the minority also inform us that the North Dakota farmer-labor party, and the Washington county farmer-labor party "never entered the LaFollette movement, but maintained their independence." As for the North Dakota party, it is simply an organization on paper. And as for the Washington county party—now it would be important if it could be shown that there is such a party in at least one county out of the many many thousands of counties in the United States. But, alas, the Washington county party is also merely on paper. The only reason it "maintained its independence" was because it did not venture to call a general party meeting. If it had, the LaFollette rank and file would have formally registered by a majority vote the defection which they made to LaFol-

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lette anyhow. Cannonsburg comrades, who are among the best and most effective workers in our party, tell me that the Washington county party, when finally boiled down after the defection of the LaFollette adherents, consisted of nothing but W. P. members and their close sympathizers. Now it is hardly more than a name. They declare that the W. P. running under its own name in the elections, would have polled as many, if not more votes than the local F. L. P.

What a sorry line-up of "masses" the minority make for the farmer-labor party. On the one hand a display for our edification of a bunch of half a dozen LaFollette parties in the granger states, and on the other hand a defunct county party in an industrial section. It is a wonder they did not dig up the deceased Buffalo and Los Angeles labor parties and parade around their weary skeletons to scare our membership into voting for the minority thesis.

The fact is there are no masses in the farmer-labor party, and there are none that can be rallied by that slogan, at least not under present conditions. Hence the slogan loses its value to the Workers Party. The C. E. C. thesis (majority) says specifically:

"We are not opposed to the labor party in principle. Neither are we bound to the theory of the historic inevitability of the labor party in America. Still less do we hold the opinion that the labor party is the only medium thru which independent class political action of the working masses can find expression. We approach his problem from the standpoint of whether the labor party slogan can now be used as a means of mobilizing masses of workers for immediate class political action, and we say neither for the present nor for the immediate future can the labor party slogan be employed successfully for this purpose."

If, however, in the future, conditions should so develop as to give a mass character to a farmer-labor party movement, and if at that time this movement offers an effective means for building the Workers Party into a mass Communist Party, then the slogan of a farmer-labor party would be of value and would be used by our party. At present this slogan does not create a united front with masses. Wherever we give it organizational form it simply creates a "united front with ourselves." It means the setting up of a substitute party for the Workers Party, the liquidating of our own party for the sake of an opportunistic non-Communist party. It would be folly to adopt the minority thesis and to embark upon a fruitless campaign for an abstract farmer-labor party. The Communist International will never sanction such a ruinous policy.

A FEW FUNDAMENTALS

By IDA DAILES.

FIRST, let us get this basic fact in our minds: The farmer-labor party was so feeble an embryo that despite our anxious and sympathetic midwifery it was still-born. And now it is buried in the LaFollette cemetery. This is an accomplished fact and on this there can be little controversy.

From here we must proceed. Two groups in our Central Executive Committee have viewed the same facts and have come forward with different conclusions. The majority of the C. E. C. says: "Well, the farmer-labor party is no more. The Workers Party, however, goes on. What shall we do next?" And they present to the party a united front program on the child labor amendment, on the Sacco-Vanzetti case, and propose that for the immediate future our political united front shall find expression in similar immediate issues of interest to the working class. No one can say in face of this, that the majority of the Central Executive Committee is abandoning the principle of the united front on the political field.

What is the attitude of the minority? It analyzes the economic situation, states the fundamental fact that with the development of capitalism comes the intensification of the class struggle; therefore, we must maintain

the farmer-labor slogans. This looks like a blue print. Blue prints are all right, but let us examine this one. The principle argument is that conditions have not basically changed for the better since the farmer-labor movement was supported by large number of workers and poor farmers and therefore it is still a vital slogan. If this argument is correct, then why did the workers and poor farmers desert the farmer-labor party on July 4, 1924? Were not conditions then the same as they were on July 3, 1923? Evidently the workers and farmers do not act according to blue prints.

Again, it seems to me that there are two great dangers in the farmer-labor slogan at present. Inside of a substantial, organized farmer-labor party, our duty is to support and criticize at the same time. We can point out the shortcomings of a farmer-labor party and propagandize for our own party. But when we come to the workers with a slogan for the creation of a farmer-labor party, we will have to borrow the red clothing of the Workers Party in order to dress up the farmer-labor party. We will have to parade the farmer-labor party as the paragon of all the virtues of a "real revolutionary class party that fights for the interests of the workers and farmers." This will mean that we