

LAFOLLETTE'S COMMONWEALTH IS ANTI-LABOR

Legislature and Courts Work Against Workers

**By JAY LOVESTONE.
(Sixth Article.)**

In LaFollette's "Model Commonwealth," Wisconsin, the state legislature, the senate and the courts are in the hands of the employing class. This ownership of the government by the bosses of Wisconsin is essentially the same as it is in the other forty-seven states of the union and in the national capital.

The state assembly and senate have voted down bills sponsored by the organized workers. The courts have declared remedial legislation unconstitutional. The workingmen have suffered greatly at the hands of the courts thru long and costly litigation.

Time and again the Wisconsin governors, elected thru the aid and support of Senator LaFollette, have used their powers of appointment to public office against the workers.

Who Owns Wisconsin?

In a survey of "Who is Who in Congress?" recently made by us, we found that the employing class has

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at least three hundred and twenty-three, out of the four hundred and thirty-five, congressmen who are either directly or indirectly associated with, or serving the ruling clique. In the Senate, the big interests have at least seventy-nine out of the ninety-six members on their side, either thru economic or social control.

In the state of Wisconsin, where LaFollette is the big political boss, the situation is nearly the same as in Washington, where Coolidge is the chief executive. On the basis of an investigation made by the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor, as reported in its 1921 convention proceedings, we find the following roster indicating who is who in the senate and assembly of the model commonwealth.

There were at that date in the Wisconsin senate, one auctioneer, four bankers, one cheesemaker, one contractor, one doctor, five farm owners, one insurance man, two real estate men, two retired capitalists, two publishers and journalists, one lumber man, four manufacturers, two merchants, one public service agent, two salesmen, eight lawyers, and only four mechanics. At the same time there were represented in the assembly the following occupational divisions: one architect, four bankers, two clerks, three contractors, three corporation officials, one doctor, forty-four farm owners, one hotel keeper, two publishers, ten lawyers, one live stock buyer, four lumbermen, seven merchants, four real estate dealers, six retired capitalists, three salesmen, two insurance men, one fisherman, and only seven mechanics.

Thus we find that out of a total personnel of forty-two senators, there are only four members of the working class, and that out of a hundred and ten assembly men, there are only seven members of the working class.

The State Federation of Labor, which is extremely friendly to and a strong supporter of LaFollette, was rather charitable to the Wisconsin senator when it characterized this ownership of the state government by the employing class as follows: "In the Senate there were nine members who can be classed as friends of labor, and four who cannot be relied upon for full support, but not antagonistic. The rest were entirely out of harmony with labor's program and should be classed as representing the interests of capital."

"In the assembly there were thirty-five members considered considerably reliable in the interests of labor. . . . The balance sixty-five members, may be classed as ultra-reactionary and absolutely controlled by special interests.

"The same reactionary speaker of the house that presided in 1919, was again elected in the 1921 session and his efforts in the interests of big business were plainly shown on several occasions during the session."

Serves Middle Class.

In the view of Mr. John Ballard as expressed in the Outlook for September 5, 1923, this employing class ownership of the senate and assembly in the state of Wisconsin is to be ex-

plained as follows: "Business of the kind that is represented by manufacturers' associations is in the main against LaFollette and his policies, but business in the person of the man with moderate capital is with 'Bob' both in little towns and big ones. The teaching profession and the professions generally, the white-collar workers, and the women vote for him every time they have a chance. Probably two-thirds of the college men of the state are with him and most of the alumni and undergraduates of the University of Wisconsin have for years given him a fervid and faithful support. A cross section of the so-called LaFollette faction would not look much like the Kansas farmers who marched thru the aisles of the Democratic National Convention in 1896.

"To a lesser but steadily increasing extent the same middle class emancipation from old party ties has gone on in the other states over which the LaFollette influence has spread."

Workers' Enemies Given Jobs.

Wisconsin has seen an avalanche of state laws to regulate the corporations. These laws have not lessened the power of the trusts by an iota, the LaFollette machine has on many occasions appointed corporation lobbyists to important posts in the government where they could do most damage against the working men. Only recently LaFollette's pet, Governor Blaine, made the notorious grain elevator and insurance lobbyist, C. H. Crownhart, as a supreme court justice.

In his appointment of Eugene Wengert as district attorney of Milwaukee and George B. Skogme as assistant district attorney of the same city, Governor Blaine flatly disregarded the recommendations of the organized workers of the state.

Thus we find the Officers' Reports to The Wisconsin State Federation of Labor Convention, held at Wisconsin Rapids, July 15-18, 1924, declare: "We regret to say that no recognition of labor has been given in the selection of lawyers to fill the important office of judge. In this regard labor was encouraged to entertain a hope, but was finally ignored."

It is particularly significant to note that when an attempt was made to regulate the private detective agencies, Senator Howard Tepsdale of the LaFollette machine and Senator Ben Gettleman, one of Blaine's lieutenants, saved the day for the bosses and killed the proposed measure to weaken the strikebreakers of the state.

Workers Disregarded by Legislature.

The much-vaunted "Wisconsin Plan" may suit the middle class property owners. This does not make it at all suitable to the working men. In LaFollettania, as in the other states where the capitalist class is supreme, the legislature has little regard for the needs and demands of the working class. From the latest available Officers' Report to the Wisconsin Federation of Labor Convention held at Superior on July 17-20, 1923, we learn of the following frankly anti-labor attitude of the state assembly and senate:

"The legislature as a whole, could not be termed a real progressive

body. The majority of the senate lived up to its reputation of conservatism and seemed to take a keen delight in defeating progressive legislation. The assembly was vacillating and uncertain, at times voting as real progressives, then again displaying the most reactionary tendencies in opposing wholesome legislation."

We cite the following as some of the leading labor measures killed by the LaFollette legislature:

"bill (501-A) providing for eight hours work on public works in the state, city, or county and minimum wage.

A bill (31-A) seeking the eight-hour working day on all state printing.

A bill (46-A) to extend the one-day in seven rest law.

A bill (469-A) the Car Shed Bill, requiring railroad car shops or other concerns manufacturing or repairing cars, to provide buildings that will protect employes from heat, rain, cold, snow, etc.

An unemployment compensation measure (53-A) to stabilize employment.

An old age pension bill (287-S).

A bill to abolish private detective agencies.

A bill (28-A) sponsored by the State Federation of Labor to limit the hours of work to eight per day in mills, factories, and manufacturing establishments.

Courts Used Against Workers.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court has been particularly hostile to the workers. Every annual report of the officers of the State Federation of Labor abounds in evidence of this hostility. We recall the instance where a boy, 6 years of age, Jerome Ptack, met his death thru the negligence of one Kuetemeyer. A jury rendered a verdict in favor of the father of the boy for \$3,500. The judge reduced the sum to \$1800. The Supreme Court acting on the appeal of the insurance company, further reduced the amount to \$1,000. The State Federation of Labor, commenting on this action of the judges against the jury, declared in its specially prepared pamphlet on the case entitled "The Wisconsin Supreme Court's Queer Slant on Life."

"The Wisconsin State Federation of Labor cannot dictate to the Supreme Court of Wisconsin what its construction of law shall be, but it can protest against an illegal and inhumane principle being given the force of law; it can and does protest against a principle which in many cases will render the statute giving a cause of action for wrongful death of a child nugatory; and it vigorously protests the invasion by the court of the constitutional right of trial by jury. We wish to state in no uncertain terms that we consider the interference with the verdict of the jury by the Supreme Court in this case an usurpation of the function of a jury."

One of the main reasons given by the Supreme Court for reducing the amount rendered in the first verdict was the fact that the father had intended to send the boy to school. Consequently, the court reasoned, the father was not deprived of any income thru the death of his son. In the eyes of these judges, it was a

crime for the father to plan to send his son to school. Apparently workers must be penalized for attempting to secure an education.

Protesting against the burden placed on the workers thru costly litigation in courts, the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor convention held on July 15 to 18 of this year, declared: "The whole matter has been in litigation for years, and we do not know how many more years these cases will be dragged. Compare these with the rapidity with which courts act in the issuance of injunctions in labor disputes."

Organized labor in Wisconsin has been especially bitter in its protests against costly litigation in the courts. The workers have suffered especially in compensation cases. We learn from a statement by R. G. Knutson, member of the State Industrial Commission, appearing in the report of the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor for 1922, that: "In the eleven years in which the compensation act has been enforced, during which time over 100 appeals have been taken by workmen, there has not been a single case in which an injured workman ever got a cent thru an appeal."

From the 1921 convention proceedings of the State Federation of Labor, we learn to what extent the workers have been suffering from injunctions in LaFollette's model commonwealth. We cite the following resolution adopted apropos this abuse:

"Whereas, four of our brothers, members of labor unions of Rhinelander, are confined in the county jails of Oneida and Langlade counties, having been sentenced to imprisonment on charges of contempt of court by Circuit Judge Reid, following the issuance of an injunction against the paper mill workers, and in behalf of the Rhinelander Paper Co.

"Whereas, these four brothers, Peter J. Christ, Matthew Jebracke, Victor Venne, and Steven Shelbrack, have sacrificed their liberty in a struggle against oppression by a greedy corporation, therefore be it

"Resolved, by the Wisconsin Federation of Labor, in convention assembled, July 19, 1921, in the city of Manitowoc, that we extend hearty greetings to these brothers who have preferred prison bars to submission to autocratic impositions and assure them that organized labor will continue to devote its energies to eliminate industrial and judicial injustices."

Finally, in 1922, the State Federation of Labor was compelled to pass a special resolution against the courts of Wisconsin along the following lines:

"Whereas, we are of the belief that some judges hold shares of stock and have financial interests in companies, firms, and corporations, and

"Whereas, by the holding of such shares of stock and having such financial interests they are very apt to be prejudiced in their judgments and decisions, therefore be it

"Resolved, that it is the sense of this convention that such a condition is not consistent with justice, especially in cases arising out of strikes, such as injunctions and assault and battery cases."