

ON DISAPPOINTED COMMUNISTS

By MAX SHACHTMAN.

When the wide west was still young, towns used to spring up overnight, due to some sudden "strike" in gold or oil. These towns were called "hettowns" because of the absence of women. Now, the men were rather a hard lot, and liked their whiskey, song, and women. The first two were there a-plenty; the last, not at all. But they were not to be halted by such a trifle. At the dance hall, certain men were chosen, for one reason or another, red bandana handkerchiefs wound around their sleeves, and they were thus transformed into "lady part-

ners." Of course, the men still remained men, but the not-quite-satisfactory illusion was created by the unhandkerchiefed men that they were dancing with women.

"Today" (as Comrade Engdahl would say), we are confronted with a somewhat similar situation in our own party. In their anxiety to establish a united front with the workers and poor farmers of this country, the comrades of the minority seem to have forgotten that the tactic of the farmer-labor party is merely a tactic, and not a principle for the Communist Party. A glance backward at the origin of

our farmer-labor party tactic shows us that we initiated it only on the basis of the fact that there existed a mass movement among the workers and poor farmers, a movement in which it was our duty to participate, to drive constantly towards a clearer class position, to seek to establish leadership over it. We did not develop this tactic in the form of a principle that it is the fundamental task of a Communist Party to create non-Communist Parties—and this must be clearly remembered.

Now, however, the fact is obvious that the farmer-labor party Jonah has been swallowed up by the LaFollette whale, and the Workers Party can hardly afford to be swallowed up in the process of becoming an emetic. The existent farmer-labor parties, all of them more or less LaFolletteist in ideology in their best days, have now become part and parcel of the Wisconsin Messiah's baggage. They have followed the siren call of the bourgeois leadership which seems to be headed in the direction of a third "progressive" party.

There is no mass demand at this time for a "class farmer-labor party"! But the comrades of the minority, who have committed the amazing mistake of elevating the tactic of the farmer-labor party to a Communist principle, and give everyone the impression that the united front manifests itself in America only in the form of the farmer-labor party, maintain that whether or not there is a mass demand for it, we, the Workers (Communist) Party want one, we need one, we cannot do without one—and by God, we're going to form one even if there is no one in it but ourselves! This is no exaggeration, since a prominent member of the minority plainly stated in the national committee of the Young Workers' League, that he was in favor of forming a farmer-labor party even if it contained only 5,000 workers.

And so this is what these comrades propose to do. We, the Communist Party, are to step out of our own garb, dress our sleeves with a red (or will it be a pink?) bandana, call ourselves a mass-class-farmer-labor party, unite with each other, and shout to the world that we have achieved the united front. We will then be able to hang out our shingle, and invite the masses of workers into our new ballroom so that they can get a dancing partner. "Come on in," we will say, "and you will not have to dance with us. You can dance with that 'mass farmer-labor party' over there. She is not so rough as we are; her step is gentler, her dancing program holds no difficulties in the way, and

he is far more mild and innocuous than you think we are. We know that you think we cannot dance, that we want to lead you in new-fangled steps, but surely there is no danger in dancing with that harmless 'mass farmer-labor party' sitting there and looking at you so invitingly. Just walk over; she's quite lonesome . . ."

Talk about your improper political dancing! Why, we would be running a political brothel!

These comrades are, if only objectively, disappointed Communists. They have no faith in the charms of the Communist Party, to continue the analogy. They think we are too uncouth to attract the masses; that we, as a Communist Party, are unable to assume the leadership of the working masses without the medium of a half-way-house (to mix the metaphor), a disguise, a piece of political mummery. They are disappointed with the failure of the Workers Party to maintain its leadership over those beautiful—altho, unfortunately, non-existent—600,000 workers who were supposed to have been so cleverly maneuvered into the good old federated. They bemoan the loss of the workers who were supposed to flock to St. Paul, but instead ran to Cleveland.

And they, who are so anxious to belittle the vote polled by our own candidate, and perhaps secretly envy the juicy 4,000,000 polled by LaFollette, probably wonder if we can't beat LaFollette at his own game. Instead of labelling capitalist politics "progressive politics, they want to label the Communist Party 'the mass farmer-labor party'."

The writer has faith in the ability of the Communist Party of America, the Workers Party, to lead the masses of workers and poor farmers into struggles against the capitalist class on the basis of real, concrete, burning issues that confront them every day. I have confidence in the correctness of our program, in its ability to rally the masses to the banner of struggle at the call of the united front on the basis of daily demands. I believe that the comrades of the Central Executive Committee majority—and in turn, the overwhelming majority of the party—do not propose to tie red bandanas around our sleeves and call ourselves another party that will appear prettier to the workers, that will serve as a substitute for the Workers Party, or as a medium for seducing them into our movement.

And I do not think that the rank and file of our party is as yet composed to tired radicals—or disappointed Communists.