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# My Position Toward the Farmer-Labor Movement

by Ludwig Lore

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In view of the veritable landslide of articles concerning my attitude, past and present, on every question of importance to the Communist movement in the last four years, I feel that I owe it, not only to myself, but to the party membership, to outline, as briefly as I can, considering the number and nature of the charges against me, my party activity and the point of view from which it has been undertaken.

I regret, Comrade Lovestone's minutes to the contrary notwithstanding, that the majority and minority theses were not submitted to me by the National Secretary [Ruthenberg] for my vote until a very few days ago, long after they had become party property, and the discussion well on its way. I am, however, of the opinion that the issue that has been thrown into the forefront of the party discussion is an artificial one, an issue that has neither foundation nor life in the labor movement at the present time. As to its purpose, there can be no doubt. In spite of the distinct instructions of the Communist International that the majority and minority groups adjust their differences, the hatchet has not been buried. The minority group is a frank aspirant to power, and is determined at all costs to find an issue, be it ever so flimsy, upon which it can base its unmitigated opposition to the present administration.

## Why a Farmer-Labor Party?

One of the fundamental tents of the Communist movement has been that the masses must become imbued with the significance of the class struggle, not merely by propagandistic political and educational endeavor, but, above all, by active participation in the class struggle on the political as well as on the indus-

trial field. Obviously, therefore, it becomes the duty of the communists to participate in every working class movement that has for its premises the maintenance of the interests of the working class against that of its exploiters, whether this movement appears on the industrial field, as a labor union, or on the political field, as a labor party.

I am convinced that, in America, the labor party will come. Not immediately. On the contrary, it will come into being only after a slow and torturous process, only after the poor farmers and organized labor have been betrayed again and again by leaders of the third party, LaFollette type. I am convinced that 1928 will see third parties in a number of states — Minnesota, the Dakotas, Nebraska, Washington — perhaps even nationally in some form or other. Out of these third party movements, themselves abortive, a Left Wing will develop that will become the nucleus for a real, class-conscious labor party movement in the future.

## Where Will We Stand?

Whether, when that time comes, the communist movement in this country will fight or support this movement will depend entirely upon the strength that we, ourselves, will have attained. If our party shall have been successful in gaining a firm foothold in the masses, it will have to take up the fight against the reformistic aims of the labor party movement. If, on the other hand, and I consider this much more likely, the Communist movement still consists of only the most advanced part of the working class, we will not only have to support the movement, but do everything in our power to become a part of it, if this can

be achieved without losing our identity.

The growth of the Communist movement in a country whose working class, like ours, lacks every vestige of political interest and understanding, will be slow. The American worker is an individualist, is incapable of seeing the larger aspects of any question of national importance. Contrary to the current impression, the American has no revolutionary tradition, and the democratic illusion still holds and will hold him in its grip so long as a certain degree of economic success can still be won by personal and individual endeavor. He will always be ready to support reformers, men who like Roosevelt, Bryan, Hearst, or a LaFollette take up the cudgels against big capital to give the little man a chance to aspire to a place in the sun.

Our work in the labor movement, therefore, will be, for years to come, to go hand in hand with the industrial labor movement in its struggles, to force it to take up a more energetic fight against the capitalist class, and in so doing to bring into being the political class consciousness that must exist before a labor party movement, in which we can participate, can come into existence.

In the meantime we will educate the advance guard in the labor movement, those who will listen to our message and help us in our work, to a clear understanding of the inevitability of the social revolution and the methods and weapons with which it can be successfully brought about.

The Communist movement can do this, however, only if it understands that it must participate in all struggles of the working class; that it must be the leader of these movements. The recent decision of the Central Executive Committee to carry on an active campaign in support of the child labor amendment is a case in point. Here our party supports not only the minimum made possible by the constitutional amendment, but demands state responsibility for the child's education and welfare up to the 18th year, as determined by federal legislation.

### **The Majority Thesis.**

Taken as a whole, I agree with the majority thesis. The farmer-labor movement is dead and is not likely to awaken to a new existence for years to come. My differences with the majority conception on the ques-

tion of the farmer-labor party are differences of emphasis rather than of fact. While I maintain that our support of the class farmer-labor movement was not accidental, but part of our fundamental Communist conception, I believe that any attempt to resuscitate the deceased class farmer-labor movement at the present time can and will result in confusion and resentment against our movement.

### **The Minority Thesis.**

While the minority evades the question of organizing a new edition of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, it stands committed by its own thesis to this program. One cannot actively engage in a campaign for theory and refuse to put it into practice. There can be but one alternative. Either we believe that there is at present in existence a distinct and numerically significant movement for the creation of a party of labor and farmers along class lines. If that is the case, it is the duty of the Communist movement to support it and to augment its growth. If, on the other hand, this movement has dwindled into nothingness, it is not our duty artificially to recreate it.

The experiences of the past year have shown us the danger of the position that the minority is taking. The very laudable desire to apply theses and theories to actual conditions led us to attempt the organization of farmer-labor groups wherever this was humanly possible. Whatever our aims may have been, the fact remains that, with very few exceptions, the state farmer-labor party organizations were artificial bodies created by our party with the help of organizations influenced or controlled by our own members. But a peculiar quirk in the human mind makes us see favorable conditions, once we have based our program of action upon certain premises, even where these do not exist. The result is a policy of self-deception, such as could have been observed in our party even after the June 17 [1924] convention, when some of our leaders maintained in *Daily Worker* articles that there was a clear division between the farmers at St. Paul who went with LaFollette and the workers from the industrial states, who maintained a class program and adhered to the leadership of the Workers Party. And yet we all knew then, as we know today, that the latter, practically without exception, represented makeshift bodies of Work-

ers Party origin. So far did we go in this policy of mutual self-deception that an attempt was made at that time to convey this obviously false impression to the comrades in Russia.

### **The Federated Farmer-Labor Party.**

In one of his articles, Comrade Cannon refers to the fact that I supported the Federated Farmer-Labor Party at a time when the present majority opposed it. This was undoubtedly the case. But a brief review of the history of our activity in the unfortunate Federated Farmer-Labor Party venture will show that the minority is right when it “refuses to have Lore pinned to its coat lapels.” At the Chicago Convention where the Federated Farmer-Labor Party came into being [July 3-5, 1923], the Comrades Foster, Ruthenberg, [Joseph] Manley, Lovestone, and myself had been appointed by the Central Executive Committee to act as steering committee. Comrade Pepper had insisted upon my membership on this committee, and I had accepted very unwillingly. It is not generally known that I strongly objected to the decision that brought about the rupture between our followers and the Fitzpatrick-Nockels-Buck group, i.e., the decision to instruct the Organization Committee of the convention to bring in a full plan for the organization of a farmer-labor party on a national scale. The steering committee persisted in its course even after [Robert] Buck had twice pleaded with the convention and with our group that the motion be withdrawn, stating that they would not stand for this thing that was being crammed down their throats. I insisted upon a special meeting of the steering committee after I had approached the members of the steering committee. In vain. I am still convinced that the split that placed us in so disadvantageous a position and that prompted the present majority to abandon the Federated Farmer-Labor Party almost at birth, because it feared the active opposition of the trade union movement, should and could have been avoided.

The opposition of the present majority to the Federated Farmer-Labor Party was obviously not based upon theoretical opposition but upon a very understandable desire to leave well enough alone. Certainly its opposition to the Federated Farmer-Labor Party offers a very poor basis for the “holier than thou” atti-

tude of this group, especially in view of its more recent (LaFollette) past.

I believed, while I recognized the gravity of the situation that our headlong action had precipitated, that it would nevertheless be possible to keep the Federated Farmer-Labor Party alive. At two Central Executive Committee meetings I moved to send out trade union organizers to bring local unions into the new party. Hundreds of local unions would have joined if an honest attempt had been made. The motions were adopted but never carried out by the present minority, then the majority, in spite of its present enthusiasm for that policy. Again, at a later Central Executive Committee meeting (unfortunately I have not Comrade Lovestone’s easy access to Central Executive Committee minutes), a program for immediate action for the Federated Farmer-Labor Party was adopted, consisting of 3 labor and 3 farmer demands, which were to be submitted to a special session of Congress, for which an energetic campaign was to be waged, counteracting Senator Brookhart’s propaganda for the immediate convocation of Congress. The program was endorsed by the Executive Council of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party with all against one vote — and there it ended. The present minority, which is so anxious for mass action, played hookey with its friends of the Executive Council of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, and the entire program was forgotten. Inquiries at later Central Executive Committee sessions for a report on action undertaken brought no response.

It would have been possible at that time, in my opinion, to build up, not a gigantic movement, it is true, but a movement that would have enabled us to galvanize large sections of organized labor into political class action, to establish for the revolutionary working class a sphere of influence that would have given it a broad field for active work, had it not been for the open opposition of the present majority and the sabotage of the present minority and the National Office. There is many a true word spoken in jest. Perhaps the remark made by an active support concerning a minority member, that “he is afraid that MY party may become bigger than HIS party” came pretty close to the truth.

But what was possible at that time is possible no longer. We who did our honest share of the propaganda work in the labor organizations before and after

the Chicago convention, we who visited the industrial and fraternal organizations and — I speak *pro dome* in this case — we who worked night after night for months preaching the necessity of political class action and the United Front, and succeeded in arousing sympathy and understanding that could have been crystallized into affiliation — we know the mistrust and ridicule that meets us today, whenever we try to repeat this performance.

When immediately after the St. Paul conference I realized the impossibility of continuing to form fake parties, I insist that our work lies for the present in the building up of the Workers Party and briefly outlined this policy last June at a District No. 2 [New York] membership meeting, to the open horror of Comrade Foster, who regarded this opinion as rank heresy. In spite of the verbal slaughter that followed, the Central Executive Committee, hardly more than 2 weeks later, took the same position and by nominating Foster and Gitlow, led the party, after 2 years wandering in the wilderness, back into a period of constructive Communist work.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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