
Report of the National Secretary to the Convention of the Farmer-Labor Party of the United States: Street Car Men's Hall, Chicago — July 3, 1923.

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To the Officers and Delegates to the Convention
of the Farmer-Labor Party of the United States:

Greeting:

This is a special convention. It has been called for a very special purpose. That purpose is of vastly more importance than the recounting of obvious evils or the consideration of purely routine party matters.

In view of the above situation I shall content myself with saying that I am presenting a financial statement covering the period since the books of the National Office were audited and approved last year up to June 1 of this year.

Aside from this, it appears to me, the only matter meriting a discussion concerning the past is the attitude taken by the party delegates who attended the meeting of the Conference for Progressive Political Action in Cleveland, Ohio last December [1922].

The first meeting of the Conference was held in Chicago in February 1922. There, due to the threatened strikes of the coal miners and the railroad workers, which later materialized into grim realities, and the nearness of the congressional elections, it was not felt advisable to try to do more than find a basis for holding together the various groups and organizations represented. Hope was held out that at the second meeting a more definite and advanced position might be taken.

Change Place of Conference.

The first conference fixed the time and place for

holding the second one. It was to have been held, like the first, in Chicago, but at the last moment was switched to Cleveland, Ohio.

Unlike the first meeting, there were early indications of the adoption of steamroller tactics. Resolutions were pigeonholed, credentials were not acted upon, and a disposition shown to jam through administrative measures regardless of consequences. After a fight led by the Farmer-Labor Party delegation the suppressed resolutions were forced before the meeting, but too late in the last session to admit of anything like a fair consideration of more than a very few. One that was quite fairly debated was a resolution offered by the Farmer-Labor Party delegates proposing to commit the conference to independent political action on the part of the workers through a party of their own. On a standing vote this resolution was defeated by a vote of 64 to 52.

Acting on the report made by the delegates of the Farmer-Labor Party to its National Committee, that body voted to sever its connection with the Conference for Progressive Political Action. This action was taken in the belief that the Farmer-Labor Party could not subscribe to the constitution and non-partisan policy adopted and continue to carry out what it felt to be its mission, namely, of bringing the workers of hand and brain into a party of their own for the purpose of capturing the powers of government. Adoption of its constitution changed the character of the organization from one of a more or less informal conference to a closely organized non-partisan movement dual to that of the American Federation of Labor.

Cleveland Meeting Dashes Hopes.

Many had hoped that the Conference would start in the direction of independent political action by uniting the big railroad unions, the farmers' organizations, and the several minority political parties. With these as a beginning it was felt that it would not be long till others would come in and a movement corresponding to the British Labour Party could be built in this country.

Some felt the Farmer-Labor Party should have continued its connection with the Conference, believing that it might yet grow into a real labor party. Some still entertain that hope. This is a degree of optimism the Farmer-Labor Party cannot share. But since it could see no promise through the Conference for Progressive Political Action, the Farmer-Labor Party did feel duty bound to itself point out a means which might result in knitting together the many warring and divided groups into some measure of political unity. The calling of this convention and conference is in response to that feeling. Invitations to participate have been widely sent out. No protesting organization, no group claiming to be radical or progressive has been slighted.

Some have rejected the invitation, some have ignored it. This was to be expected. There are few organizations, as there are few individuals, that care to be trailblazers. The many prefer to drift with the tide and take the easier way. If we succeed in accomplishing the objects for which we are assembled, and in proportion as our program meets the approval of the slower and more critical groups who are not represented, others will join and we shall grow in power and influence. Thus a step forward will have been taken.

Need for Labor Party Felt.

The time honored policy of the trade union movement in this country has been non-partisan. It has been built on the theory of rewarding friends and punishing enemies. Even this policy has been given its narrowest interpretation by many who have assumed that it must be confined to choosing between candidates of the Republican and Democratic Parties. Others, adhering to their understanding of this policy, have insisted that where friends appeared in neither of the

old parties it was a duty to set up a new party, separate and apart from the gold-dust twins of big business.

When a comparison is made of the injunction secured against the United Mine Workers to prevent their threatened strike in 1919 by the then US Attorney General, A. Mitchell Palmer, backed by the Democrat administration, and the one obtained by the present Attorney General, Harry M. Daugherty, supported by the Republican administration, against the striking railroad shopmen, it is seen that both are enemies of the workers, and each will exert itself to crush organized labor. Indeed, Mr. Daugherty quite frankly stated that the whole power of government would be used to prevent the unions from destroying the "open" shop movement. What has been the experience of the organized industrial workers will, I am sure, be found equally true among the farmers.

In the face of these undisputed facts it is amazing that the workers of both fields and factories can be induced to support candidates of the Republican and Democrat Parties rather than massing their political strength in a party of their own. It is almost unbelievable that leaders could be so unmoved by experience as to advocate the continuation of such a fruitless policy, and equally unbelievable that men and women could be found to follow those who so advise. The answer is, of course, that we are so hopelessly divided that the workers conclude that the slight choice offered between two recognized evils is the best that can be expected.

Civil Liberty at Low Ebb.

The Farmer-Labor Party at its inception adopted the policy of fighting none of its rivals. It also refused to quarrel with officials of the labor organizations or to be drawn into factional union strife. It felt such a policy would win converts. It has made a growth that to many would be satisfactory. But its successes have been in spots only. It has not as yet rallied to its support any large number of the more powerful international unions or the large farm bodies. The main reason for this slowness of growth is, doubtless, to be found in the fact that all the other groups and parties claim to be trying to do the very thing the Farmer-Labor Party is trying to do. In the 1920 elections in Illinois, there were 10 candidates for Governor. Big

business was represented in the Republican and Democrat Parties, and the opposition was divided 8 ways. The workers themselves felt the situation was hopeless and thousands voted for the candidates of one of the old parties.

This must stop. Civil liberty is at a lower ebb today than ever before. Rights long cherished are slipping away. Great combinations of wealth are becoming more and more ruthless. Farmers are losing their farms. Promises are made wholesale, fulfilled retail. These ills constitute a necessity for closer unity of the workers politically.

This is a truth with which all agree. The big problem is: "How can it be done?" The Farmer-Labor Party has tried to learn what general plan would meet the largest measure of approval from those who are represented here today. It has been felt that political parties would not surrender their own entity; labor and farm bodies, for the most part, are not constructed for political purposes primarily. A number have suggested a federated structure to which labor organizations† and also political parties might become affiliated. Full autonomy, by this arrangement, would be granted to each affiliated organization. The term "federation" is well understood. A federated labor party would thus become self-explanatory. Whatever may be the defects of the federation plan, they would not constitute a barrier at this time, and corrections and improvements could be taken care of at succeeding conventions.

FLP Provides Opportunity.

In this connection it is worthwhile calling attention to the structure of the Farmer-Labor Party itself. It is provided therein that political, economic, and cooperative groups may become affiliated without being required to forfeit any of their individual autonomy. If the present Farmer-Labor Party could be constituted as or converted into the central body of a federation it would have the advantage of being already established, and in quite a number of states has the standing of a recognized political party. Moreover, there are several hundred local labor organizations already affiliated with it.

Since it is our hope that out of this convention

will come a larger body than was originally anticipated, it is probable that changes in the organic laws of the Farmer-Labor Party would be necessary in order to provide for automatic membership on the National Committee of any group that might at the outset or later become affiliated.

It would appear to be desirable that such representation on the National Committee should be based somewhat on the membership represented by the affiliating body. Whatever instrument is set up to constitute the central body, provided the federated party idea appeals to the delegates, should have an Executive Committee with somewhat larger powers than the present Executive Committee of the Farmer-Labor Party. Such a body should preferably be elected by the convention rather than by the National Committee, as at present.

Such an Executive Committee would be called upon to act in reality for the National Committee in all minor matters at least till such time as funds were available to enable more frequent meetings of the National Committee than has so far been possible. As the number of affiliated bodies increased problems affecting the relations of the groups to each other would arise, applications of new organizations for affiliation would have to be passed upon, and conventions of the federated labor party for the adoption of a platform and the naming of candidates arranged.

Urges New State Branches.

In those states where no political organization already exists eligible to affiliate, energetic steps should be taken at the earliest possible moment by the National Executive Committee to promote the organization of such a body. Other duties of a more or less obvious character, which would devolve upon such a National Executive Committee, will indicate the proper scope and functions of such a body and, I take it, indicate the wisdom of having its members elected by the convention.

Provided the present Farmer-Labor Party structure could be made to fit the requirements demanded, officers could and should be chosen who are best fitted to push the work without regard to those who are at

†- Line of type missing from printed account, content approximated by editor from context.

present serving for the Farmer-Labor Party.

In order that consideration of the above suggestions may be properly had and all interests protected, it is but proper that at this point the status of the Farmer-Labor Party and the other groups, who by order of the National Committee have been invited to confer with us, should be defined and the method of procedure indicated.

The National Committee of the Farmer-Labor Party has directed that as soon as the convention shall have been organized, it shall adjourn as such and immediately call a conference to be made up of itself and all invited representatives, where the vital problem of political unity, which concerns the same pressing degree both the conference our own convention, be at once taken up. At the conference the Farmer-Labor Party will become merely one of the participating groups and as such will join with others in trying to find a basis of unity.

Conference Non-Binding.

The findings of the conference cannot bind the groups responding to the invitation to confer, neither will they be binding on the Farmer-Labor Party, but will have to be referred back for consideration when our convention reconvenes at the conclusion of the conference.

In the belief that the suggestion herein made may commend itself to some of the groups, other than the Farmer-Labor Party, I have drafted amendments to the present constitution, which together will furnish a basis for discussion by whatever committee may have the duty of considering such plans as may be advanced by those represented here, for effecting united action.

On an occasion such as this many questions press for consideration. But this is not the convention that can properly deal with them. If we build wisely and well we can make a start here that will enable us to hold a convention next year; where the delegates will assemble 10,000 strong and whose tramping feet will add emphasis to the things we do and the things we

say. Such a convention would serve to demonstrate to the enemies of labor that the days when we stage combats between ourselves over capitalist issues are at an end.

Law Penalizes Poor.

Concentration of wealth and the ever increasing improvements in its production should serve as a warning to the workers that unless they can close ranks correspondingly they are going to be worsted in the fight. New times bring new problems, and new means for their solution must be found.

Long neglect in developing political unity among the workers in this country has been made the most of by the plunderbund of the nation. Farmers find themselves at the mercy of the money trust, as helpless as though lashed in a straitjacket. Trade unions are obliged to fight not only their employers, but the national, state, and local governments as well. Every newspaper every day proves there is in this country one law for the rich and another for the poor. The rich may freely advocate any form of open violence and lawlessness while the prison doors close upon the poor for the mere expression of their opinion. The time, the place, and the opportunity for correcting these conditions is here today. If the deliberations of our convention, and the conference which is to follow, are marked by a broad tolerance on the part of ourselves and those who have done us the honor to accept our invitation, even the weighty problem confronting us is possible of solution.

If, out of this gathering, will come something that will revive the hope of those who have fallen in discouragement by the wayside and justify the faith of those who are still in the fight, I am sure the Farmer-Labor Party will be happy in knowing that it has played a small part in setting in motion the impulses which shall have accomplished it.

The workers of farm and factory, of hand and brain, have a right to expect that we shall measure up to our responsibilities on this important occasion.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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