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# June 17th After LaFollette

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Now that a week has gone by since the LaFollette statement,<sup>1</sup> we can estimate the result of the LaFollette attack on the June 17th Convention and the Communists.

Very likely LaFollette and the leaders of the CPPA [Conference for Progressive Political Action] who unquestionably inspired his statement thought that they were doing an injury to the Communists in making this public attack upon them and upon the June 17th Convention because of their participation. Actually the reverse is true. LaFollette and the leaders of the CPPA did the Communists a great service by their public attack.

The Communists, as represented by the Workers Party, never had any illusions in regard to LaFollette's candidacy. They knew that LaFollette would not represent the workers and exploited farmers of this country. In my pamphlet *The Farmer-Labor United Front* I wrote: "We know that so far as the revolutionary movement is concerned that its victory will be over the dead body (politically) of LaFollette."

On the other hand, the Workers Party said publicly that if the workers and farmers who still had illusions in regard to what

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<sup>1</sup> Reference is to Sen. Robert M. LaFollette's widely published open letter to Wisconsin Attorney General Herman Ekern of May 26, 1924 disavowing the forthcoming June 17th Convention of the Farmer-Labor Party since it would not "command the support of the farmers, the workers, or other Progressives" owing to its having "committed the fatal error of making the Communists an integral part of their organization."

LaFollette stood for, and nominated him at the June 17th Convention, the Workers Party would not therefore split away from that convention. It would remain part of the Farmer-Labor United Front, knowing that at some stage of development LaFollette's actions and policies would of themselves create the split between the workers and exploited farmers and him.

What has actually happened is that LaFollette through his attack on the June 17th Convention has created this split earlier than it was expected. If the Workers Party had made a head-on attack against LaFollette last November when the June 17th Convention was first arranged or in March when the final arrangements were made it would have alienated from itself the masses of workers and farmers in the Northwest particularly, who believed that LaFollette should be the leader of the Farmer-Labor movement. Such a fight made at that time would have forced the farmers and workers closer to LaFollette and delayed the time when they would separate themselves from him.

By following the policy of criticism, stating to the workers and farmers that LaFollette would not be the leader of the movement, that LaFollette stood for other interests than those of the exploited farmers and workers, but at the same time making it its purpose to accept his nomination and continue the fight if the majority of workers and farmers demanded that policy, the Workers Party gained the confidence of those who are supporting the Farmer-Labor movement by emphasizing the need of the organization of a Farmer-Labor Party as against a loose movement around the candidacy of LaFollette, it built up the ideology which when LaFollette did actually come out in the open as he did in his statement last week made it impossible for LaFollette to sweep along with him in his opposition to June 17th and the Communists the Farmer-Labor support of the convention.

The reports from the Northwest states show that all of the six state Farmer-Labor Parties which participated in the arrangement of the June 17th Convention are standing firmly for June 17th and against LaFollette.

In fact, all the worthwhile elements which supported the June 17th Convention are standing firmly by that convention.

### **The Class Party.**

What LaFollette has done for the Farmer-Labor movement has been to strip away from it all those elements which have no place in it. The Farmer-Labor Party, if it is to have any role in American political life, must be a class party.

When we say a class party, we mean a party which represents definite class interests; the same political party could not represent the class interests of the exploited industrial workers and farmers and at the same time represent the interests of the group known as the Committee of 48. The same party could not represent the class interests which LaFollette represents in American political life and at the same time fight for the interests of the poor farmers and the city workers.

The inclusion of such elements as those of the Committee of 48 and the progressive groups represented by the LaFollette elements in Congress, would have meant that the Farmer-Labor Party would be a mongrel. Such a Party would have divisions within itself which would have made it impossible for it to carry on an aggressive fight because of the contest within the organization itself.

It was necessary, in the movement for the organization of the Farmer-Labor Party, to accept temporarily the support of some of these elements, but the Communists at all times kept clearly in mind that at some stage of the development of the party it would be necessary to separate these elements from the Farmer-Labor Party. What Senator Robert M. LaFollette has performed for the Farmer-Labor Party and for the Communists is to slough off these elements before the opening of the June 17th Convention. We give them a hearty "Goodbye" as they go on their road to the July 4th Third Party Convention, maybe to support [William] McAdoo.

## **What June 17th Promises.**

With the discordant elements eliminated, the way is open for the organization on June 17th of a class Farmer-Labor Party.

The June 17th Convention will still represent from a half-million to a million organized workers and farmers. Out of the representatives of these workers and farmers, there can be welded a mass, class Farmer-Labor Party with a platform which will clearly express the economic interests of the producers of wealth of the land and the producers of wealth in the mines, mills, and factories in this country.

Such a party will be stronger than a party of double the size made up of heterogenous elements with different economic interests. The grouping together in one party of J.A.H. Hopkins and "Dad" Walker of North Dakota would not have added strength to the Farmer-Labor Party — it would have meant weakness rather than strength. Robert M. LaFollette, the representative of small business in the Senate and William Bouck, the leader of the farmers of Washington, have nothing in common. They represent different economic categories, and to try to unite them in a political party would have been to create the conditions for splits and confusion and withering away of the whole movement.

But William Bouck, Tom Ayres, "Dad" Walker, W.H. Green, William Mahoney, the rank and file of the Farmer-Labor movement, and the Communists can form a Farmer-Labor Federation with a program of action in the interests of the exploited farmers and workers and build upon this program a solid mass movement organized against the domination of Wall Street in the government of the United States.

## **Coalition and Party.**

LaFollette's attack on June 17th has also made near the definite formation of a national Farmer-Labor Party at the June 17th Convention.

Without this striping away of the non-Farmer-Labor elements which has taken place as a result of LaFollette's statement, there would have been a strong argument for a coalition rather than a party. J.A.H. Hopkins and his group would have been a foreign element in the body of the Farmer-Labor movement. To endeavor to make a unit of such different elements would have been dangerous. With these elements removed, there remains the material for a strong party organization.

The reaction on the part of the state Farmer-Labor Parties to LaFollette's statement shows in itself their attitude on this question. The state Farmer-Labor Parties are for the organization of a national Farmer-Labor Party. They want a party which will go on from this fight to the next fight and continue the fight until the struggle against Wall Street control of the American government is won and a Workers' and Farmers' Government is established.

The June 17th Convention, before LaFollette's statement, presented many dangers and difficulties. It had within it the elements which might have made the organization of a strong political party to fight the battles of the farmers and industrial workers impossible. LaFollette's attack has removed many of these difficulties. The road is now clear for the Farmer-Labor movement to march forward. The way is open for the organization of that mass, class Farmer-Labor Party on June 17th upon which hundreds of thousands of industrial workers and exploited farmers have placed their hopes for relief from the unbearable conditions to which the exploiting class subjects them.

*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport*

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