

The Minnesota F. L. P.

Six Years of Confusion and Disappointment in a Two-Class Party

By Vincent R. Dunne

Three hundred thousand workers and farmers in Minnesota, who have by their support of the Farmer Labor Party in the campaigns of the past few years demonstrated a willingness to move politically against the bosses, face another barren year and new disappointments.

The party to which they have given so much, stumbles towards coalition with the Democratic machine for the state and congressional campaign of 1930. If full coalition is not reached this year it will not be for lack of work and will on the part of a large and influential section of the leadership, but rather because this leadership is unable to come to agreement upon individuals from the different camps to head the ticket.

F. L. P. Policy Benefits Officialdom

Even a brief and hurried review of past political campaigns of the F. L. P. will be enough to convince any intelligent workman that the party has been dominated by people who read history backward, in order to justify a policy which, by no stretch of imagination, can be considered beneficial to anyone except that coterie of officials, who use the offices given them by the party for petty bickering and personal advantage.

Shipstead is of course, the outstanding example. But he is by no means alone. During the course of the party's existence, dozens of men have been sent to the State house, many county and municipal officials have been elected, several U. S. congressmen and two U. S. senators have been sent to Washington. Out of this numerical array, not a SINGLE man has appeared who measures up to the standard of a workers' representative. Not ONE among them has had either the courage or the vision to propose any measure, which would call in question the existing order and place upon the order of the day a thoroughgoing change from the vicious system of class exploitation.

Not one among them has ever had the courage to use the tribune upon which they strut, (like their Republican and Democrat brothers) for the purpose of calling the working masses into action. Rather they have held in check the ferment in the ranks in various ways, especially by truckling in a hundred forms to the prejudices of the most backward. A good example of this, is the action of state Senator Lawson in voting for the Anti-Evolution Bill (to bar the teaching of the theory of evolution in public schools). Lawson is also editor of a F. L. daily paper at Wilmar.

It is true that most of the leaders are in disagreement with Lawson on this and it is just as true that these leaders do nothing to expose and remove him and others who, by actions of a piece with the one cited, live, mentally at least, in the feudal age.

Always the program of the Party has been trimmed to meet the wishes of those elements who look to the countryside for support and approval. Without exception, at every turning point, in all campaigns, before and during each convention or conference, the proposals or demands of advanced sections of the workers have been denied.

Farmers Outvoted Workers

The workers have been outvoted in every state convention, the most important committees having been governed by a seven to three vote with the farmers always seven and the industrial workers three.

All the proposals by the Communists and Left wing for a closer affiliation of the unions to the Party have been hailed with cries of "split" by the farmers; and the "practical" politicians and labor "leaders" in control of the machinery have never failed to turn thumbs down on these demands. Two instances of this sort of kowtowing to reaction should be cited as typical. In several State conventions the proposal was made by the Left wing to give the local unions affiliated to the Party direct representation to the state conventions. After many attempts had been made to put this into effect, the workers, over the opposition of the farmers and the leadership, were finally able to achieve a half measure of recognition. The unions are now ALLOWED—to send ONE delegate to conventions, who has the standing virtually of a FRATERNAL delegate!!

For a long period the Communists, together with the Left wing, attempted to gain affiliation for a large group of milit-

ant workers through their co-operatives and workers clubs. The all too successful plans devised by the leaders to keep these thousands of workers out of active participation, make nothing less than shameful history. It is of extreme importance that workers generally review the history of the Minnesota Farmer Labor Party, that they grow familiar with the path along which so large a number of workers have been led, only to find themselves, after years of struggle and sacrifice, burdened with a party dominated by the ideology of the petty property owner and led by opportunists of the first order.

Of still greater importance, are the reasons for this state of affairs and a clear understanding of the mistakes made years ago which led inevitably to the present situation.

"Unity" in a Two Class Party

First of all, the condition of the Minnesota F. L. P. with its list toward merger with the old parties of the capitalists, is not the result of false and incompetent leadership primarily. Any political party composed of two classes, as is the case in this instance, with farmers and workers in the same organization, maintains unity only at the expense of the program put forward by the most exploited and propertyless section. The leadership of such a party can lead only as long as it is able to hold back the thrusts of the workers and satisfy the demands of those elements whose political outlook is bounded by the illusion that it is possible to achieve security under the capitalist order, by acquiring property or enhancing the value of that which they already hold, through reforms, half measures, etc.

The program of a party is the expression of its aims; if the program is wrong fundamentally, those leaders who base themselves upon it have no choice but to follow a path of compromise. Workers in industry always have before them the grim reminder of their position in our present social system. For them there is no question of property; the overwhelming majority have none, the vast mass face the problem daily of making their meager wages stretch out in order to cover the bare necessities of life. Why then do we find this state of affairs in Minnesota? Whence came the idea that together, that is, within the same party, workers and farmers could work towards a solution of their problems?

It is a matter of history that in 1924 the Communist Party under the leadership of the Right-Centre bloc in the International and the Pepper leadership in America, forced the merger of the Farmers Non-partisan League with the Working Peoples Non-partisan Political League.

Pepper's Bold Plan

This, to be sure, was the local manifestation of a plan, national in scope which, according to Pepper and his followers, was to make the farmers, if not the spear-head, at least the haft of the weapon that would strike the decisive blow for the workers.

Still within the International in this period, the Leninist-Bolsheviks headed by Trotsky, were able to check for a time, the development of this un-Marxian course: Stalin's theory of "dual composition" parties finally prevailed through the East at a later date, only to do immeasurable damage to the world revolutionary movement. (For a full realization of the enormous damage done by this reactionary idea, workers should secure and read the pamphlet, "The Draft Program of the Communist International," by L. D. Trotsky, published by the Militant.)

It is the purpose of this article to deal with the local and national effect of the false idea of dual composition parties and to bring out clearly, in this connection how wrong tactics proceed from wrong programmatic formulations.

The idea of Farmer Labor Parties, once planted in the favorable soil of the farmer-worker state of Minnesota, grew and blossomed under the guidance of a labor-farmer-compromiser type of leader, whose one burning desire seems to be junction, by any crossover, with some form of "progressive" or "liberal" political movement.

It is not without significance, that the F. L. leaders, almost without exception,

look upon the "progressive bloc", Brookhart, Wheeler, Norris, Frasier, etc., as the real leaders and have an almost child-like faith in them. Naturally, these leaders are knowingly or unknowingly expressing the wishes of the dominant group within the Party—that is the farmers.

The present maneuver towards the Democrats has at least a two fold purpose. First: to capture the Governorship and so to build up a machine within the Party which can be used in the future for bigger and better mergers. Secondly: it is now generally recognized that the Minnesota movement cannot stand alone. The leaders now understand the danger to the movement and are trying in this confused manner to give a new lease of life to the party, hoping against hope that the national "progressives" will come to their aid and lead them into the green fields of a new "liberal" movement on a national scale.

Workers Used by Farmers

With this political outlook, the leadership, from the vantage point of the farmers' wagon, from time to time sees bogholes in the road ahead and is forced to use the workers as pushers of the cart in such bad spots as political campaigns, financial difficulties, etc.

That the workers have nothing to gain from this horse play must be evident to those who give it a little thought. It must be evident also, that the poor farmers, those without land (the banker's hired men) are being led along a path that will deliver them, bound and helpless, into the hands of the common enemy, for although the farmers belong to a different class than the workers, they can be delivered from their bonds only by supporting the workers politically. The workers, because of their class position, must lead. Only thus can victory be achieved.

Does all of the foregoing preclude the possibility of the workers making an advance politically, through a Labor Party? Not at all; the fact is, that millions of industrial workers still are bound to the political parties of the dominant capitalist groups. A Labor Party based upon workers' organizations, with a program permeated with the idea of the struggle of the classes, can serve as an instrument in rallying the masses for a march toward the Marxian solution of the great problem.

Gertrude Duell Joins the Opposition

NEW HAVEN, Conn.—Comrade Gertrude Duell, one of the most active members of the Communist Party in this city, becoming convinced of the correctness of the platform of the Opposition, joined the New Haven branch of the Communist League of America (Opposition). Having been secretary of the Workers International Relief, she was not only expelled from the Communist Party for supporting the Opposition, but was also removed from the secretaryship of the local W.I.R., despite the fact that there was no other comrade available for the post. The local Stalinists calculated that rather than have an Oppositionist as secretary of the W.I.R. it would be better to see it collapse and go out of existence. This is precisely what happened. Comrade Duell then received a letter of inquiry from Ludwig Landy, national secretary of the W.I.R., concerning the collapse of the local work. She replied with the following letter which requires no comment:

Ludwig Landy, Executive Secretary,
Workers International Relief,
949 Broadway,
New York City.

Dear Comrade Landy:

Responding to your letter of the 3rd inst, will say that you are correct—I am no longer secretary of the W.I.R. in New Haven. Nearly two months ago I informed the Comrades here of my belief in the claims of Comrade L.D. Trotsky and the Opposition and I adhere to the Platform and principles of the Communist League of America. I am certain that until the Comrades of the Opposition are recalled and take their rightful place in the Party, no unity can prevail nor can success be attained in the work undertaken.

I was instructed to turn the books and material over to Comrade Pearl Liebenson, 470 Columbus Ave., this city, who was appointed in my place. I have likewise turned over to her the 300 W.I.R. buttons and collection lists recently received from your office.

Fraternally yours,
(Signed) Gertrude Duell

A Real Red I.L.D.

And Hell Hath No Fury Like an Engdahl Enraged

The International Labor Defense, which lived a modest life for several years as a defender of persecuted workers on a non-partisan basis, has finally awakened to the implications of the Third Period and become militant. The formal pronouncement of this change in character, which has been in process for some time, coincides and quite appropriately with the elevation to the national secretaryship of the man whose name is a symbol of blood and thunder and sudden death—J. Louis Engdahl.

One of the indications of this emergence of the I.L.D. butterfly of the Third Period from the constricting chrysalis in which it lay supine for so many years is the formal and official discarding of the reactionary, counter-revolutionary, social-fascist and renegade nonsense about non-partisanship in the defense of class war prisoners. The regenerated I.L.D., having killed off with several blasts of its new horn its old time antagonists, the frame-up system of class justice, the courts, the police the persecutors and similar small fry, is now turning its devastating proclamations on other enemies, some of whom, alas! have been concealing themselves within its ranks and disguising their nefarious purposes by supporting and working for the I.L.D. and even contributing their Judas gold into its collections.

"Basing itself squarely on the class struggle" (at last!) "the International Labor Defense takes up the fight against all enemies of the working class." It is no less a man than J. Louis Engdahl himself who is speaking, and let all the aforesaid enemies take notice and run for cover while there is still time. "The I.L.D. cannot tolerate as members of its organization those who are opposed to its class struggle policies."

In case anybody should be in the dark as to what this bold declaration of war on the enemies of the working class means, Engdahl, who was trained in militancy for years under Hillquit and Berger and who learned from them how to hunt down Reds like the bloodhounds of Simón Legree tracked the fugitive slaves, makes the matter clear. "The I. L. D.," says Louis the Seventeenth, "combats the hostile policies of Cannon and Lovestone viciously and those who support them . . . The theories and practises of Cannon and Lovestone and their followers are hostile to these class interests. No honest worker can support the views of either Cannon or Lovestone."

We can't speak for Lovestone in the face of this hour of calamity. Engdahl, who worked for him as faithfully as he worked for Berger or Hillquit, knows him better and is in a better position how he will accept this fate. We can speak only for our poor selves, and we do not conceal our fears as Engdahl attacks us with all the fury of a cornered rabbit. We need help and we want it.

Yet we paused a moment, try feebly to stiffen our quivering limbs, and reflect that after all Louis is not the real author of our misery. He is but a witless instrument of circumstances who has bounced from Berger to Lovestone to Foster as the baseball bounced from Tinker to Evers to Chance, putting all men out, or he may be likened to the subject of Napoleon's famous aphorism: to the effect that an army travels on its stomach, and Louis was always in the army and always traveling.

Far be it from us—who have known the pangs ourselves—to begrudge any man his bread and butter, but when he becomes carnivorous and wants meat—ay, the human meat of our poor carcass—we cry aloud: God save us from being the meat in this cannibal's soup!

150 Workers Laid Off

BOGALUSA, La.—(FP)—150 employees of the New Orleans Great Northern Railroad have been laid off in the shops. The road has been acquired by the Gulf, Mobile and Northern Railroad Company.

NEW YORK (FP)—Two million men and women over 65 are dependent for support on other individuals or agencies, estimates Sec. Abraham Epstein of the Assn. for Old Age Security. One third of the aged in American are dependent, he states, after a careful survey of estimates made by other agencies, ranging from the well known insurance company figure that 54 out of 100 young men of 25 will be dependent when they are 65, to Massachusetts estimates that 40% are dependent.