

On the Proposal for a New Farmer-Labor Party Fraud

In this letter we wish to elaborate on the brief and hurried note sent to you on September 27. We are in a better position to act now because we have had the opportunity to think more thoroughly of the questions involved, because we have received the point of view of comrade Swaback, and the minutes of your executive committee meeting of October 8 1930.

Four questions are involved, which are all connected with each other and touch upon our fundamental principled position, for maintaining which the Foster group of Centrists combined with the Lovestone Right wing to expel us from the Party and hound us in the revolutionary and labor movements. If we approach these questions from the standpoint of expediency, the need of snap decisions someone compels us to make by a certain date, or from an allegation that a combination of circumstances exists in which our theories and principles are not supposed to hold, we are guaranteed in advance to make terrific blunders, to retard our progress, and compromise our movement. Our point of departure in these as in other important questions can only be that of revolutionary Marxists who do not yield on principles.

I

What Party shall we support in the Minnesota elections: the Communist Party or the Farmer-Labor Party? We believe that the decision of the Minneapolis branch on this point is absolutely correct. We support the only Party of the proletariat, the Communist Party, and oppose the petty bourgeois Farmer-Labor Party and in this we have the approach, not of a faction, but of our class. The official C.P. is not merely the only political organization in the elections that speaks for Communism and the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, it is the only Party that represents and defends the interests of the proletariat. Does it do this intelligently, or correctly at all times? There is no dispute among us on that point! It does not. The marionette leadership imposed upon the Party is distorting and discrediting the cause and name of Communism, it defends the proletariat's interests badly at times, and even inflicts great damage upon the cause of the workers. But in spite of that it differs from all other parties by the fact that it DOES defend these interests and the workers who come to its support do it not because of the Reeves and Erowders but in spite of them. That is precisely why we, who represent the future of the movement today urge the workers to support the Communist ticket at the same time that we subject the Party leadership and its destructive policies to a merciless criticism. By refusing to take responsibility for the blunders of Stalinism, we uphold the cause of Communism before the workers. The Farmer-Labor Party, on the other hand, represents and defends the interests of the petty-bourgeoisie in the cities and the better off elements among the farmers—the latter dominating the Party in alliance with the corrupt trade union bureaucracy and careerist bourgeois politicians a la Shipstead, Olson and Co.

Take the characteristic case of Lundeen. In which direction has he gone? Unmistakably to the Right. Yesterday, he collaborated with the Communists at least in the so-called "anti-imperialist" work and in the political movement. Today he opposes the Communists and collaborates with the leaders of the Party, which from the letter of O'Flaherty himself, is dominated by the Backus power and lumber interests, and willy-nilly he serves as a mask for these interests. (Lundeen, it is well to bear in mind is to be one of the fathers of the new movement planned for the Northwest.) If it really is a question of what "tail we should ride"—and in actuality it is not at all—then we unhesitatingly choose our Party as against that of Backus-Shipstead-Lundeen. What divides us from Stalinist Centrism is how to make the revolution; what divides us from Farmer-Laborism is why to make the revolution. The one division can be bridged, the other cannot.

II

The official Party is not a fetish with us. Our relations to it depend upon a multitude of circumstances which differ at various times and places. In general, our attitude is pressure from within the Party

The letter printed on this page was recently sent by the national committee of the Communist League of America (Opposition) to its Minneapolis branch. The occasion for the letter was a proposal made to the League to participate in the founding of a "general Left wing paper" in Minneapolis, to be launched after a conference on October 13 1930, at Superior, Wisconsin. The conference was initiated by the directors of the newly-founded "Farmer-Labor Party of Montana", a movement centering around the *Producers News* of Plentywood, Montana, edited by Charles Taylor and T. J. O'Flaherty, and has been endorsed by the leaders of the Finnish cooperatives in Superior (Halonen and others recently expelled from the Communist Party), by the Lovestone group, and by a scattering of individuals formerly active in various Farmer-Labor Party ventures. The significance of the conference does not at all in any "mass movement" it represents, because it doesn't, but in the thoroughly opportunist conceptions inspiring it. Not the least important of its features is the growing rapprochement between the Lovestone faction and the Right wing Finns who find a common basis in such opportunist adventures, as well as in their general conceptions.—Ed.

by those workers whom we convince of the correctness of our position and by class conscious militants outside the Party. This means a firmly welded Opposition movement, which it must be our primary duty to strengthen. Particularly in Minneapolis, where the relation of forces is very advantageous to us, our efforts should be concentrated upon recruiting revolutionary workers directly into our ranks. We are not building a second Party, so we have little to worry about from the empty accusations to that effect made against us by the Party bureaucrats whose own policies and acts have systematically cultivated the seeds of opportunism and social democracy within and without the Party itself. In this sense, the action of comrade Cowl is incorrect.

Why should this position be construed as leading to "isolation", to "sectarianism"? All analyses that conclude in this manner may be based upon conjecture and upon a sound refusal to become disconnected from the masses, but they are surely not based upon the experiences of the movement, not in one but in many countries. Where has the impatient desire to become a strong movement overnight and at any price, led other groups in the Opposition before us? The hostility towards the official Party shown by the Paz group, and its contacts with the Right wing in an attempt to build some sort of a bloc led not to mass contact but to Paz's isolation. Brandler's "mass movement" and conferences for "unity" with Left social democratic elements, his open opposition to the official Party in the Saxon elections led to the inevitable result: thousands of workers who originally followed the Right wing deserted it.

Our position, on the other hand, like that of our French and German comrades, has strengthened us. We have gained new and invaluable recruits from the Party ranks (and we will gain more, and in addition, we have won the organizational adherence and sympathy (especially in New York) of revolutionary workers outside the Party.

III

As to the "Left wing" paper to be published in Minneapolis, as proposed by Taylor and O'Flaherty, in what way can we involve ourselves in responsibility for it? In your minutes of August 9, 1930 it says: "The policy of the paper according to O'Flaherty will be that of a general Communist organ with a humorous touch. Will not be the organ of any faction, although he proposes to work in harmony with the local E.C. and the N.E.C. of the League. Wants the paper to cover the Northwest class struggle with a national and international perspective. Expects to solicit the support of prominent Farmer-Laborites like Lundeen and others." The proposal of O'Flaherty for the character of the paper is the principal "humorous touch". It will not be the organ of any faction (that is, presumably, of neither our Group nor Lovestone's) but it will have a national and international perspective. What kind of a perspective? Lovestone's? Ours? The two differ sharply. Or will it be its "national and international perspective", i. e., its political outlook and policy, be neither Lovestone's nor ours nor that of the official Party? Then whose will it be?

Comrade Cowl raises a pertinent question when he envisages an editorial board "let us say composed of O'Flaherty, Taylor, Halonen, Gitlow and Dunne or Skoglund" (and maybe, Lundeen!). What will the policy of such a board be towards "two-class parties", towards the Indian or Chinese revolution, towards the dispute in the Communist movement towards the cooper-

ative's role in the class struggle towards the "new unions", in a word towards the whole complex of world and domestic problems which cry out for solution? We think the envisaged composition of the editorial board is a guarantee that the paper will be anything but "in harmony with the local E.C. and the N.E.C. of the League". How will we be able to assume responsibility—without indelibly compromising ourselves—for a paper which sways helplessly between the Left Opposition and Lovestone or the Superior Finnish movement, or the Lundeenites or similar nondescript elements.

We are not opposed to a popular paper which concentrates upon agitating among the workers for a certain minimum program without being definitely and avowedly stamped as the organ of any specific section of the movement. We have had such papers in the movement before, and they have been of service. But at the same time it must be dominated by a distinct political conception and guidance, which will not and cannot be the case with the proposal under consideration. The paper will either be torn to pieces by contending viewpoints as soon as an important question arises, or else it will go along with the Right wing combination represented by Lovestone, Halonen and others, and compel us to fight it openly from the beginning.

IV

1. The proposed paper is only the literary expression of the other proposal: the formation of a "Farmer-Labor Party movement in the Northwest". Upon what and whom is the movement—which is in our opinion enormously exaggerated by the Montana people—based? All evidence points to the farmers and not the workers. The so-called "movement" has begun in Sheridan County, Montana, where it is avowedly based upon the farmers, as can be gathered by a reading of the *Producers News*. The only other "concrete" instance is North Dakota, where a handful of individuals, formerly associated with such movements has been revived. The exclusively agricultural nature of that state needs no exposition. With the exception of a really insignificant movement among a small group of miners in Illinois, these two (Sheridan County and the North Dakota tempest in a teapot) are the only instances adduced to prove the spread of the Farmer-Labor Party movement. Both of them are farmers' movements in every sense.

As we pointed out in our note of September 27, "The base of the Communist movement is the industrial proletariat. It is not our task to organize the farmers politically into a party. The Comintern everywhere (and in the U.S. particularly) almost broke its neck in similar adventures which had nothing to do with Marxism". Is it not of great significance for us that the further East one goes, i. e., the further one goes towards the section of the country where the industrial proletariat predominates there is less and less of any distinct labor or farmer-labor movement afoot?

2. What becomes of our principled position on "two class parties" in this situation? Has it lost its validity? We think not. Do the adventures with Raditch in Yugoslavia mean nothing? Does the criminal gamble of Stalin-Bucharin with the "four class" party of the Kuo Min Tang, which wrung the neck of the Chinese revolution and set back the world revolution for years, bear no warning for us? Does the "two class party" formed by Stalin-Bucharin-Roy in India, which has left the Indian proletariat without revolutionary leadership especially in these critical days, teach

no lessons? And finally, are the instructive and rich experiences with "two class parties" in the United States, from 1924 to this day, to be lost not only upon Lovestone and the Stalinists but upon us Marxists as well? The articles on the lessons of the Minnesota F.L.P. written for the *Militant* by our Minneapolis comrades, are worth a re-reading, especially comrade Dunne's and comrade Hedlund's recent article endorsed by the Minneapolis branch. What great change has occurred since Hedlund's article?

This whole venture, therefore, is born under an inauspicious star: the two class party. The fact that Taylor and O'Flaherty, who declare their agreement with us on most other questions, are making arguments today so vehemently for a two class party should be already sufficient to make us hesitate. Taylor's arguments are reminiscent of Bucharin in the worst days of the Kuo Min Tang adventure. According to him, the Montana farmers (at least) are virtually proletarians by now! What should make us hesitate even more is that Taylor writes that Gitlow "remarked that he was surprised if the Trotskyists acquiesced, because of the Trotsky position against the 'two class Party'." And good grounds for surprise if we were to cast overboard our elementary principled position on this question for the sake of a bloc with Gitlow and the Superior Finns, who, like Taylor see nothing wrong with Communists not only joining a two-class party (and "so-called" is a correct adjective, for in reality it is the petty bourgeoisie that runs these parties), but in advocating their initiation and organization. They see nothing wrong in it, because they also agreed and still do agree with the Kuo Min Tang policy of the Comintern, and Roy's policy in India, and the rest of the decalogue of the Right wing in the Communist movement and evidently with the whole Pepperistic conception of the "revolutionary farmers", and Federated Farmer-Laborism. But that is no reason for our supporting such a reactionary hotch-potch.

It is true as comrade Dunne says, that Pepper cannot be credited with originating the idea of a farmers and workers party (that probably goes to Stalin), but Pepper can be "credited" (together with Lovestone and Co.) with having led the American movement through all the disgraceful adventures with Farmer-Laborism in America, with the ideas of the notorious "August thesis", that every political party has a farmer-labor party of its own, that out of the F. L. P. would develop the "mass Communist Party" overnight that the Communists—confronted with the "third American revolution"—would become the unblinking hangers-on to the LaFollette kite, etc., etc. Lovestone wants to repeat the yesterdays that should never have occurred. O'Flaherty and the Finns apparently want to turn backwards the wheel of Communist experience and history while we want to move it forward. In that sense we stated before: "It is not our job to revive Pepperism in the northwest but to liquidate all remnants of it."

3. Finally, the Superior conference. We are decidedly opposed to any participation of our group in this conference, just as we are opposed to participating in the formation and promotion of the new paper and "the movement" rising out of it. Our position must be stated categorically and without concealment, so that this agglomeration of opportunists is prevented from carrying out its negotiations and dickering behind the scenes. What unity could we possibly expect to establish there? The conference is the second inauspicious star of this new "movement". Our position is not determined geographically, and we do not condemn a unity or bloc with the Right wing in Germany, or in New York, only to accept it in Wisconsin. It is proposed to unite all the Communists "not under the organizational whip of Stalin". But being in that state is no particular virtue in itself? At Superior it is proposed that the variegated elements represented there should form a "Communist" nucleus, a "caucus" to represent Communist policies and interests in a "broader Left wing conference". What sort of Communist policies will be represented by a caucus embracing the Lovestone liquidators, the Superior business cooperators (we reiterate the appellation, because it is entirely true), the two