

Labor Party Movement in the United States

By Israel Amter.

Several months ago at the convention of the American Bankers' Association, Frank Munsey, a well-known publicist and newspaper proprietor, delivered an address on the present political and economic situation in the United States. Munsey frankly demanded a re-alignment of American political forces. He declared that there was no differences between the official position of the Republican and the Democratic Party. The time had come for the parties to take a realistic stand and join forces.

What we want, said Munsey, is a Republican-Democratic Party composed of the conservatives of the whole country, against the radicals who must now be forced out into the open.

Nicholas Murray Butler president of Columbia University, who also stands high in conservative circles, has made the same demand. Chas. Nagel, who served under Taft, and Lindsey Garrison, who served under Roosevelt take a similar attitude.

All of these statements were applauded—the Bankers' Association voting to publish Munsey's speech in pamphlet form.

The time has come for a reorientation. Leading progressives and radicals, particularly in the ranks of the Republican Party have seen that. La Follette and Borah are the two men who have perceived it most clearly and are working towards a realization of this plan. Their methods are different—*both of them are ambitious*. Both realize that the workers of America, are getting a new point of view—and without them and the hard-pressed farmers, no new movement can succeed in the United States. It is the lesson of the Russian Revolution which has brought a new perspective into the mind of the American worker and farmer.

La Follette's method is to capture the machinery that already exists. That has been his policy since the early days of his career. He realizes the difficulty of building up a new organization—especially in the United States *whose political life is dominated by big capital*. Hence, La Follette is not, proclaiming a new party, but is remaining in the Republican Party, boring from within with the intention of capturing it. La Follette is a winning personality. He is a most courageous man, who dared to stand out against the war as few others did, *as the Socialist, Meyer London did not!* La Follette has known how to

manipulate forces. He is a friend of the farmers. He has not hesitated to electioneer for Non-Partisan candidates. He again knows how to win the sympathy of the workers. He sponsored the Seamen's Act, which was supposed to protect the American seamen, but which to-day is a dead letter. He delivered a speech at the last convention of the American Federation of Labor, and was hailed by Gompers as Labor's candidate for the presidency in 1924. Like Borah and others of his group he dares to stand up and speak for Soviet Russia. His points of contact with all sections and tendencies in the Labor Movement are obvious.

The policy of the Socialist Party, the brutal attacks on the Communist Party, which, in 1919, was driven underground and the reactionary attitude of the A.F. of L. bureaucracy, left the American working class politically unorganized and untrained. The organization of the Farmer-Labor Party by the Chicago Federation of Labor in 1919 did not achieve the results hoped. Even the membership of the Chicago Federation did not support it as it should have. Although the Chicago Federation of Labor is one of the most progressive in the country, there was lacking political insight and penetrating, militant leadership to build up a party capable of meeting the bourgeoisie in America.

In February, 1922, a conference took place in Chicago to discuss the question of a Labor Party. During the few years preceding the date of the conference, the American working class had engaged in colossal struggles against their employers. The tremendous steel and railroad strike of 1919, the coal strikes of 1920 and 1921, the packing house strikes—all of which were followed by the fearful unemployment of 1921; the espionage in industry; the unmitigated use of police, private guards, State constabulary, militia and Federal troops against the workers; the issuance of brutal injunctions; the denial of the right of picketing and even of striking; the confiscation of union funds for the payment of fines and indemnities—all of these factors induced the progressive elements in the country to meet in conference to discuss the possibility of a Labor Party.

Several large labor organizations had already gone on record in favor of a Labor Party. The United Mine Workers, the Railroad Brotherhoods, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the Non-Partisan League, the Farmers National Council, the various proletarian and semi-proletarian political parties, and a mass of confusionists participated in the conference. As a result of this lack of class point of view, the conference adjourned without having accomplished anything concrete. It decided to convene again in December to take up the question once more.

Between February and December 1922, many important events took place. The violent coal, textile and railroad shopmen's strikes occurred. The Supreme Court issued the Coronado decision, whereby workers were held liable to a penalty of three times the amount suffered by their employers as a result of a strike—which meant practically the confiscation of the Union funds. The Supreme Court declared the Child Labor Law unconstitutional. But the most infamous event was the issuance of the Daugherty Injunction, whose aim it was to put an end to strikes—to declare them illegal, to subject anyone to prosecution who displayed the slightest sympathy with the strikers, either by word of mouth, by telephone or in writing, who supported them financially or otherwise. It was the most far-reaching the most sweeping edict ever issued by the United States Government against the Workers. Attorney General Daugherty declared openly that he would use the whole force of the United States Government in defense of the Open Shop movement. It appeared to be a life and death struggle for the workers.

War preparations were made against the workers. The troops were supplied with tear gas as a preliminary to other methods. The police were equipped with machine guns and an aircraft division was installed. A spying system such as even the most reactionary governments have not been able to adopt, was instituted.

As the time for the Labor Party conference approached, the campaign in favor of a Labor Party took shape and power. The Communists carried on a lively campaign through the Workers Party, and were the most energetic exponents of the idea of independent political action by the workers. The Socialist Party was loud in support of the idea. The organizations mentioned above, the Chicago Federation of Labor, the Minnesota State Federation of Labor, the Railway Crafts Division of the A.F. of L., the International Typographical Union, the World War Veterans, other farmers' organizations and large local unions advocated a Labor Party.

On December 2, a conference took place in Washington. La Follette, shrewd manoeuvrer as he is, called a conference of the People's Legislative Service for Progressive Political Action, to take a stand on the political situation. Its function was

obvious. It was to forestall the creation of a Labor Party a week later at Cleveland, at which, it was presumed, the Communists would be present, and at which a radical program might be adopted and a clear class standpoint manifested.

The Socialists and the "progressive" and conservative labor leaders attended this conference, only to go to Cleveland to sabotage the idea of independent political action by the workers. The Socialist Party, which made a big noise before the conference, completely sold out the idea in Cleveland. Hillquit openly worked with the retrogressive group of the conference—and thus postponed the establishment of a Labor Party.

The Cleveland Conference adopted a program that the progressive conference at Washington would have been ashamed of. It tried to "railroad" through every idea. First of all, it refused to seat the delegates of the Workers Party, the Young Workers' League (the organization of Communist youth), and the delegates of the local unions. The progressives in the conference were unorganized and without leadership and made no fight for the Communists. Then the reactionary leaders, together with the Socialists, Hillquit, Oneal and Berger, endeavored to prevent all discussion of the very purpose for which the conference was convened, viz., the question of a Labor Party. But the progressives forced them to grant this discussion on the basis of a resolution that they had submitted to the Resolution Committee, which the Committee tried to suppress. The Railroad Brotherhoods were against a Labor Party. The Socialist Party was too cowardly to put up a speaker at all. Their committeeman in the Resolution Committee voted against the Labor Party. The betrayal was complete. The Labor Party was lost by a small majority.

The conference adopted one idea, however, that was good for the promotion of a Labor Party. It allowed Municipal and State Labor Parties to be created for municipal and State elections. It was understood also that the groups participating in the Labor Party conference would accept the obvious meaning of this decision. It denoted a United Front of all working class organizations—with the idea of the eventual formation of a National Labor Party.

The Communists do not regard the failure to form a Labor Party at this conference as a calamity. On the contrary, it is good that matters should develop somewhat more before a Labor Party is formed. The Socialists are revealing themselves more and more as the bulwarks of capitalism. In New York City, St. Louis, and in the State of Rhode Island, they rejected a United Front in the November elections with the Workers Party. At the Cleveland Conference they voted against seating the Workers Party delegates; not, as the spokesmen for the reactionaries stated, because the Workers Party is made up of Communists who are "un-American," but because the Workers Party is trying to "disrupt the American labor movement".

Since the Conference, United Fronts have been organized in several towns—in San Francisco with the Workers Party in it. In Chicago, the Socialist Party nominated its own candidate for mayor and then expected the Farmer Labor Party and the Chicago Federation of Labor to endorse him. This has completely estranged the working masses of Chicago and exposed the piratical tactics of the Socialist Party.

The Farmer Labor Party and the Chicago Federation of Labor, totally disgusted with the outcome of the December Conference wish to establish the Labor Party at once. The Communists are against this step. A Labor Party that is not a Real United Front of all progressive and radical proletarian elements will be no Labor Party. The Labor Party must have behind it the organized labor forces of the country—the trade unions. Until they, or at least a large section of them openly support the Labor Party the Labor Party will not be successful.

The United Mine Workers are on record in favor of a Labor Party. At Cleveland, their delegates managed to evade voting on the question. The Nationalization Program recently issued by the U.M.W.A., but which is repudiated by the official journal of the miners, demands a Labor Party. The rank and file of the miners are for a Labor Party. The rank and file of all the organizations represented at the Conference are for a Labor Party. The movement in favor of a Labor Party, therefore, is only beginning. The Communists are carrying on a militant campaign in favor of it. The Trade Union Educational League, which has had success in the amalgamation movement, has added the idea of a Labor Party to its program.

Under the impetus of the revolutionary and militant organizations, the movement for a Labor Party will have gained great momentum by the time the next Labor Party conference is called. There will be a well organized group intent upon launching a party of labor.