

Where Does La Follette Stand?

By ISRAEL AMTER.

America faces a revolution," declared Magnus Johnson when campaigning for election to the United States Senate. The propaganda was effective among the farmers and workers of Minnesota and Magnus Johnson was elected.

Johnson assured his electors that he would make a great noise at Washington, and that he would roar with the loudest of the progressives. But Johnson's roaring has all been of milk: smooth and sweet, as it comes from the cow. Johnson does not think of the revolution any more—although the situation of the farmers has become worse, with no prospect of betterment.

La Follette, on the other hand, has been roaring in the Senate for many years. He struck a brilliant note when the Teapot Dome scandal was brought on the scene. Here he was able to shine; the republican party was being completely discredited and La Follette could begin to hope that the fragments of the party would be gathered up in a new party with himself as the leader and spokesman. But history is not made up of scandals; it is the product of sterner forces, the scandals merely showing the rottenness of the prevailing system. La Follette has pricked the surface of the powerful forces that run the government and has made attempts to uncover them. Is it because he cannot go any further or that he dare not go too far, for fear that the workers and farmers will learn TOO much of the system and its methods?

Both hypotheses are possible. La Follette has had to deal with the present rulers of society; he has been compelled to take a stand many a time. His refusal to approve the war, his militant defiance of the war mania showed that, at least, he had the backbone of a man with convictions. That was glory enough to carry him along for a long time. His fight against the railway trust was a good one, and perhaps he believed and still believes that he will be able peacefully to conquer that trust and the many others that govern the United States. That is his illusion and the illusion of the many millions of workers and farmers of the United States who understand little of the political forces fighting for control.

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The workers of the country have awakened somewhat to the nature of the power that confronts them on every side. Although they may not be able to make a synthesis of events under a democratic (capitalist) regime and succeeding events under a republican (capitalist) regime and thus arrive at the conclusion that something generally is wrong with the whole capitalist regime and system, still for the past five years at least they have begun to believe that the employers, manufacturers and financial magnates have entirely too much control of government. Hence they have begun to think in terms of political action by the workers. Needless to enumerate the trade unions that have gone on record in favor of a labor party—even though such expressions of opinion have been systematically sabotaged by the trade union officialdom. Needless to mention the trade union locals which responded to the referendum of the Trade Union Educational League on the question of a Labor Party, and the great number which never received the referendum because of the opposition of the local secretary of the

union. Though the movement for a Labor Party is not universal among the American working class, the more awake, virile sections favor it—despite their knowing that it cannot succeed at the first election, and their wish to have voted for the winning party at each single election.

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The farmer, on the other hand, is up against the capitalist on all sides. He is literally crushed by the trusts and the banks, and every attempt to get legislation in his favor has met with a rebuff both from the Democratic and the Republican government. As a consequence, he has naturally turned to political action and the many movements in the past thirty years indicate his determination to do some things for himself. Hence we find in the movement throughout the middle and far west that the farmers are going into the movement by the tens of thousands.

But an even more significant phenomenon is manifest today. Whereas in former times, the farmers had their distinct movements and were little inclined to cooperate with the workers, the attacks of the trust and the feeling of common suffering, are uniting them with the workers. Movements like the Non-partisan League are doomed in America. Their place is being taken by the farmer-labor movement—a movement of revolt against the trusts—the enslavers of the workers and the farmers. It is a groping revolt, not the product of consciousness—and surely bereft of all understanding that behind the trust and big capital is the GOVERNMENT, representative of wealth and power. The making and unmaking of laws, the issuing of injunctions, the ignoring of the sufferings of the farmers deliberately and savagely by the government, have fastened the eyes of the workers and farmers on Washington. Senators and representatives have been sent to Congress and presumably have put up a militant fight particularly in behalf of the farmers. They are few in number, and only a fortuitous situation has placed them in the position of power; the balance that they wield they have exercised with great shrewdness and acumen. The movement, however, that has placed them in Congress, and the sufferings and the movement that they ostensibly represent are far stronger than the group itself. The revolt of the farmer is clear, for it is based on the economic condition of the farmer. The revolt of the worker is more vague, for economically he has not yet felt a great pinch and he feels only the pressure of the law—particularly of the injunction, which he tries to evade.

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The movement is just taking form; it is impelled by economic motives and by the fact that this is an election year. At least four million workers and farmers have openly expressed their will to undertake independent political action. These workers and farmers are more or less clear on the proposition. The more militant and nearly class-conscious of them are for the immediate formation of a farmer-labor party; the others express it in a less distinct form.

The petty-bourgeoisie, professionals and liberals, who suffered during the war and have not recovered, are seeking redress in some form or other. They are totally unorganized and filled with the same democratic illusion that a "good" government will give proper attention to their situation.

The Progressive group in Congress are well aware of this situation. They have been the expression of it and have helped to crystallize it. The power they have wielded in Congress has helped to organize it. The politically unconscious and semi-conscious groups have been encouraged in their organization plans and are beginning to seek power. The organized workers have looked to the Progressives to take the lead of the movement; the organized and unorganized farmers have regarded the Progressives as their spokesmen. La Follette knows it; Brookhart knows it; Shipstead and Norris know it. **Why have they not acted?**

They have not acted because they are too weak, too cowardly to take a definite stand on these burning questions. They are waiting to see what the Republican convention will do; they wish to see what forces they will have behind them before they split. They do not regard themselves as PART of the movement, but merely as its leaders. But they are wary leaders not venturing the fight till the army demonstrates its strength.

This stand is plausible; LaFollette, Johnson, Shipstead, Brookhart, and the others ARE NOT PART OF THE MOVEMENT. Their interests are not bound up with it. They do not share the sufferings of the workers and exploited farmers. They are plain politicians attempting to capitalize these sufferings and build a movement for themselves.

It is highest time to talk to these gentlemen. The workers and exploited farmers must demand to know where these people stand. Are they willing to line up with the workers and poor farmers IRREVOCABLY against the big capitalists? Are they willing to throw in their lot against the government of the capitalists? Are they willing to become a part of the coming Farmer Labor Party, submitting to its control?

They have already clearly demonstrated their stand: **THEY REFUSE TO LEAVE THE REPUBLICAN PARTY.** They are dicker with the Republican generals about candidates and platform; either a "liberal," "progressive" program to fool the masses, or a "progressive" candidate. This will keep the Republican party intact and ensure victory at the polls.

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Is this what the workers and exploited farmers want? Are they not aiming at the formation of a Farmer Labor Party? Can the Republican Party of Wall Street be made an instrument of the workers and poor farmers? **THE ANSWER IS CLEARLY AND EMPHATICALLY NO!** A farmer Labor Party must be formed, and these would-be leaders must be told to remain where their interests place them, viz., in the ranks of the capitalists. They are betraying the movement now when it is seeking leadership; they will betray it later when it is moving to power. Have the workers and farmers not been sufficiently betrayed in the land of "democracy" for them to have learned that this new movement dare not be trifled with? Or must they pass through one treason after the other before they will wake up?

The answer must be given to the Progressive group—to LaFollette, Shipstead, Brookhart, and all others—not after the Republican convention, but NOW. Too much time has already been lost. The workers and poor farmers can organize, build and run their party themselves.