

LESSONS OF THE McDONALD MEETING

By MARTIN ABERN.

July 2nd! The farmer-labor party campaign is on! The first big gun after the June 17 convention in St. Paul nominated McDonald and Bouck is being fired at the first mass meeting in Chicago. The hall is packed, many standing. There is cheering and shouting; horns blowing; whistles screaming. For what? Presumably in support of the farmer-labor campaign. Very good, so far as that goes.

Workers Party Members Compose Farmer-Labor Audience.

But—the hall is packed with whom? By Workers Party members and a few close sympathizers. The meeting is held under the auspices of the farmer-labor campaign committee—but every member of the committee is also a member of the Workers Party because no one else would serve. And this huge demonstration, staged very effectively like a good theatrical performance or a circus, by the Workers Party and supported only by the Workers Party and its close sympathizers—had the result of promoting, not Communist principles, but farmer-laborism. Speeches! Speeches by farmer-labor candidates and by members of the Workers Party. Speeches, most of them weak, flabby, inane, filled with reformist-capitalist ideas; sickening stuff for Communists

to listen to in the name of a movement for independent political action by the workers. Speeches by Workers Party members—hardly distinguishable from the farmer-laborites. The real Communist guts and spirit were not there. All thru the evening the thousands of Communists, as a matter of discipline, made great applause—but there was no real enthusiasm for the mockery of class political action by the workers.

Covering the Lion with a Lamb's Cloak.

I am sure that every comrade in that meeting must have been appalled at the idea of continuing this stuff thru the period of a parliamentary campaign. It was not struggle and progress that was represented at this meeting; it was weakness. And this very first meeting was a concrete and singularly outstanding example, typical of the national situation, of what the movement for a farmer-labor party had, in fact, become—the Workers Party in disguise, kidding itself that it was outside of its skin. Worse than that, it was itself falling into the slough of confusion of the farmer-labor movement. "We attempted to save a farmer-labor soul which didn't exist and in the process we nearly lost our own Communist soul."

And meanwhile, where were the

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The Discussion on Party Tasks

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wide masses, swinging toward independent political action? They were attending meetings which, to them, were realizing their desires. They were at the LaFollette meetings. It is now as plain as daylight. Farmer-laborism and the mass sentiment, such as it was, for independent political action had disappeared as snowflakes in the sun, had been absorbed even at that hour by the petty-bourgeois, middle class movement led by LaFollette.

The thot is sokening that we might have gone on, deluding ourselves and poisoning our movement, after the masses of workers and poor farmers had gone, some sections to LaFollette and others to that apostle of "independent class political action," Cal Coolidge.

Already the facts were pressing for a change in policy by the Workers Party; the Chicago meeting indicated not life for the young farmer-labor movement but only a few stray sparks and flareups of a dying fire. It required only the additional experience of the Cleveland C. P. P. A. conference on July 4. After that it was plain to all who would see, that the sentiment and movement for a farmer-labor party had been almost entirely smothered or absorbed into the LaFollette movement. What remained of that movement was already organized in the Workers Party or closely allied with it.

United Front in Daily Struggles Led by the Workers Party.

The Central Executive Committee of the Workers Party, acting in accordance with the changed political conditions, on July 8 correctly declared that we must enter the campaign under the banner of the Workers Party in order to carry on a truly working-class independent political movement. Since the campaign was over, the C. E. C. has, in the election statement and the political thesis now

before the party, further developed the new political situation and logically and correctly, according to Communist principles, charted the course for our Workers Party. Both the campaign for organization and propaganda for a farmer-labor party must be left behind. Other forms of the united front, based upon the daily struggles—strikes, unemployment, shop-committee agitation, general labor councils—must be found and employed. For the labor party is not a fetish; it was not for us a principle of organization or of the class struggle; it was merely a form of the united front which for the present is dead. We want no fake labor parties; no delusory united fronts; nothing which breaks down the morale and discipline of our own party; no united front with ourselves; no substitutes for the Workers Party. Instead, unity from below; unity with the workers thru participation in their everyday struggles, with the Workers Party as the center and leader of these struggles.

The Chicago farmer-labor meeting showed us quite early, in a startling and concrete form, two political facts of supreme importance: First, that the LaFollette blast had swept whatever sentiment there was (aside from the Workers Party) for a farmer-labor party into the hopeless middle class marsh. Second, that the malarial germs of that swamp were already beginning to work inside our own party, supplanting Communist principle with farmer-laborist opportunism. The healthy instinct of our party, its sound Communist character at bottom, showed itself. We threw off this diseased disguise, emerged erect, and made a campaign that established our Communist integrity and strength. We can now be proud of the revolutionary banner of the Workers Party. And we can be glad that the farmer-labor meeting in Chicago on July 2, along with many other experiences, taught us some lessons.

WHO ARE THE FARMER-LABOR COMMUNISTS?

By C. E. RUTHENBERG.

It seems that we have come quickly to that stage in the party discussion in which epithets and name-calling is to be substituted for arguments on the basis of principles and facts. In two articles, one by Comrade Foster and one by Comrade Cannon, the Marxian group in our party, which wishes to continue to base the policies and tactics of our party upon an application of Marxism to the economic and political life of this country—in which we made our beginning under the influence of Comrade Pepper—is branded as "Farmer-Labor Communists."

Throwing stones, when one is living in a glass house, has always been regarded as a dangerous business, and in this instance it is the glass house of the Foster-Cannon group which their stone thrown at the minority of the central executive committee is bringing about their ears. If there is any "Farmer-Labor Communism" in our party it has its lodging in the minds of the members of the Foster-Cannon group. It has not only remained in the minds of this group, but it has manifested itself again and again in concrete proposals and in refusal to adopt other proposals.

The minority of the central executive committee in this discussion does not have to resort to epithets and name-calls. There is so much material at hand to show the lack of Communist clarity, their hesitations and vacillations in relation to the pursuit of truly Bolshevik policy, that name-calls and epithets would only weaken the damning evidence in a recitation of the facts.

Attitude Toward the Farmer-Labor Campaign.

The first fact, which shows the hypocrisy of the epithet "Farmer-Labor Communism" is the division

over the question of our attitude toward the farmer-labor party. This first appeared in the central executive committee in August, 1923. The Foster-Cannon group was opposed to the organization of the federated farmer-labor party. It was against the Workers Party following up the victory which it had won at the July 3, 1923, farmer-labor convention. It was for an all-embracing, all-inclusive farmer-labor party and against the organization of the left wing which had come under the influence of our party. This attitude, which was based on the conception that the organization of an all-embracing farmer-labor party, was a goal in itself and repudiated the viewpoint that the farmer-labor campaign was a maneuver for building, strengthening and establishing the leadership of the Workers Party. In contrast to this the Pepper-Ruthenberg group declared in the August, 1923, thesis that when the interest of the Workers Party come in conflict with the goal of organizing the all-embracing farmer-labor party of Foster-Cannon dreams, that we must unhesitatingly sacrifice the farmer-labor party. It is not hard to decide which of these two viewpoints expressed what is included in the new epithet, "Farmer-Labor Communism." It was certainly not that of the present minority of the central executive committee, which in effect declared: If we can thru this situation build the Workers Party into a mass Communist party of a hundred thousand workers, we will follow the policy which will bring that result and say "to hell with your all-embracing farmer-labor party."

The Candidacy of LaFollette.

Fact number two, which the central executive committee minority submits in answer to the epithet, "Farmer-Labor Communism," has to do with

the attitude of the central executive committee of our party toward the candidacy of LaFollette. This question first arose in connection with the farmer-labor conference held in St. Paul, Nov. 15, 1923. It was this conference which was to issue the call for what later became the June 17 convention. On Nov. 13, 1923, there was a meeting of executive council of the central executive committee to outline the policy which was to guide our delegates to the Nov. 15 conference.

I quote the following from the minutes of that meeting:

St. Paul Farmer-Labor Conference.

Comrade Foster submitted the following motion:

"That if the conference takes up the question of candidates we shall support the nomination of LaFollette."

Comrade Ruthenberg submitted the following proposals: (There follow seven proposals to guide our representatives, among which is point 4): "That we propose that nominations be left to the convention (we are not for LaFollette, but if the convention nominates him we will not split on that account)."

The Foster motion was defeated by a vote two in favor and nine against and the Ruthenberg motion adopted.

I quote now from the minutes of the executive council of Nov. 20:

"Motion by Foster: That an effort be made to see that negotiations with LaFollette in regard to his candidacy be carried on by the labor party group in place of being left to the committee of 48 group."

Comrade Foster explained, in relation to his motion, that in 1920, when he was a member of the Fitzpatrick farmer-labor party, Fitzpatrick had made the mistake of permitting the committee of 48 to bring forward LaFollette as a candidate, in place of the labor group making him their candidate, and this error should not be repeated.

I admit, that with Comrade Foster, I made the error, corrected by the Communist International, of being ready to make the third party alliance thru the farmer-labor party and if compelled to, accept the candidacy of LaFollette, but I submit that there is a difference between the acceptance of such a candidacy after a fight against it had been lost in order not to separate ourselves from the farmer-labor masses and the proposal of Comrade Foster that "we shall support the nomination of LaFollette" in the farmer-labor conference.

It is certainly unnecessary to ask the question which attitude represented "Farmer-Labor Communism!"

Loreism.

Fact number three has to do with Loreism. The theses of the majority of the central executive committee is very aggressive in its attack on Loreism and the Two and a Half International tendency. One might wish that the same central executive committee majority has been as aggressive in its action against Loreism in our party. Unfortunately for our party its aggressiveness had developed merely a pre-party convention demonstration before the membership. In practice it has been the protector of Lore against the efforts of the minority to bring the Lore tendency into the light of day and root it out of our party. The question of Loreism was before the central executive committee at its meeting on March 18, 1924. Comrade Lore had written his editorial on the Fifth Anniversary of the Communist International, in which the policies of the Communist International were misrepresented. I moved at that meeting: "That the central executive committee issue a statement correcting Comrade Lore's editorial on the Communist International and his statements regarding Zinoviev." Comrade Pepper amended: "That we censure Comrade Lore and issue a statement."

A sub-committee consisting of Foster, Bittelman and Ruthenberg was elected to bring in a statement on the question. The sub-committee was unable to agree, Comrades Foster and Bittelman bringing in a proposal

to the effect "That the central executive committee objects to the erroneous statements in regard to the Communist International and instructs Comrade Lore to write an editorial correcting them." I stood on my original proposal that the central executive committee issue a statement against Comrade Lore's editorial. My motion and that of Comrade Pepper were defeated by the central executive committee majority and the Foster-Bittelman proposal adopted, the minority voting against it.

Thus the central executive committee saved Comrade Lore from censure and from denunciation by the central executive committee of the Two and Half International tendency expressed in his editorial before the whole party. The story of other efforts made by the minority to compel the central executive committee to fight against Loreism make more emphatic the above evidence that the central executive committee majority, which for election purposes thunders against Loreism, has been the protector of Loreism in our party.

The Controversy in the R. C. P.

The attitude of the Foster-Cannon group toward the controversy in the Russian Communist party last year is fact number four throwing some light on the question in which group in our party this tendency called "Farmer-Labor Communism" has its breeding place.

The issue in the Russian Communist Party was whether the party should retain its Old Guard Bolshevik leadership which had won the revolutionary struggle and maintained the victory of the proletarian revolution against all its enemies. In February, 1924, Comrade Pepper proposed that he write an article for the March Liberator endorsing the stand of the Old Guard Bolsheviks. Comrade Cannon objected. In the central executive committee meeting on March 18 Comrade Pepper moved: "That we endorse the Old Guard in the Russian Communist party." Comrade Foster submitted the following amendment: "In view of the fact that the controversy in the Russian Communist party has been decided by a conference the central executive committee is of the opinion that it is not called upon at this time to take a position on the merits of the controversy. The central executive committee will print in the party papers all the documents bearing on the debate and will encourage the members to study them and to discuss the question in the party papers. The central executive committee will condemn any attempt to make a factional issue of the matter in the American party."

Some weeks later, in reply to an appeal from the representative of our party in Moscow, that we send a cablegram to the convention of the Russian Communist party endorsing the position of the Old Guard Bolsheviks, I sent such a cable on my own responsibility, there being no opportunity to consult the central executive committee. It was not until Comrade Foster's return from Moscow that the majority of the central executive committee consented to the adoption of a resolution officially putting the party on record for the Old Guard Bolsheviks. Evidently Comrade Foster had learned while there that the Communist International did not look with favor on parties which refused to take a position on such a vital question as the controversy in the Russian Communist party.

Who Are the Farmer-Labor Communists?

On the basis of this record we hurl back into the teeth of the Foster-Cannon group the epithet, "Farmer-Labor Communist." Let the Foster-Cannon group stand up before the party and try to explain this consistent refusal to follow a Bolshevik policy as shown by this record of fact. Epithets directed against the group in the party which has consistently fought against their vacillations and compromises when faced with a question of following a Bolshevik line, will not cover up these facts from the record.