

The Workers Party to the Fore

By Wm. Z. Foster

STANDING out above all other facts in American social life today is the break from their old political moorings of great masses of workers and farmers. Notwithstanding the political immaturity of these masses, and their illusions, which combine to make them easy prey to the middle-class politicians of the LaFollette type, the disillusionment of large masses with the two traditional parties of American capitalism remains the biggest political fact today. By the time these lines appear in print the elections will be but a few days off, and we shall soon have more facts upon which to estimate the depth and extent of the movement of the masses. But even now the broad outlines of the situation are clear. Especially is it possible to judge the historical role of the LaFollette movement, and the tasks which are thereby placed upon the shoulders of the vanguard of the American working class—we Communists and our immediate sympathizers.

What is the LaFollette Movement?

The LaFollette movement has furnished the channel into which has been turned the elemental mass movement of disillusioned workers and farmers. Only the class conscious portion of the working class and poor farmers will follow the lead of the Communists in this election. But to say that the LaFollette movement has the support of great masses of workers and farmers tells us very little about its nature and historical function. It does not mean that LaFollette or his movement represents the interests of these workers; to admit such an argument would be equivalent to admitting that Warren Harding, in 1920, represented the interests of the millions of misguided workers who swelled his vote and helped place Daugherty, of injunction fame, in office. No, the LaFollette movement is the most dangerous enemy of the toiling masses of America today.

What we see in America in the LaFollette movement is the same historical fact that is finding expression on an international scale in the revival of the "democratic illusion" as a means of halting the revolutionary mass movements of populations thrown into action by the breakdown of the international capitalist system. The imminence of this wave was pointed out at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International in 1922, and the Fifth Congress definitely fixed the characteristics of this period. It is expressed in Germany by the Social-Democratic party, in England by the Labor government of Ramsay MacDonald, and in France by the left bloc of Herriot.

These four movements, in Germany, England,

France and the United States, all differ among themselves in many respects. But all have this in common—they are political coalitions or alliances between the small and middle capitalists, the professional elements, the well-to-do farmers, certain sections of the labor aristocracy, and the officialdom of the labor movement. Their programs and actions are determined by their social composition. They are inevitably dominated by a capitalist ideology, they base themselves upon the institutions of private property, and they carry out the imperialistic policies of the capitalist class as a whole. They are essentially hostile to the aspirations of the working class. They are the last reserves of capitalist "democracy."

The "Democratic Illusion."

"Democracy" under the capitalist system is a set of forms to mask the dictatorship of the capitalist class. In times of "normalcy" it puts into office such open servants of Wall Street as Warren Harding. If the workers are still "normal" this year it will put the capitalistic puppet, Coolidge, into power. Under such conditions capitalism operates quite brutally and openly through the government, with Daugherty injunctions, "red raids," and armed force against the workers. Why not? The workers continue to approve with their votes! But when the masses begin to revolt against the flagrant "Wall Street control," and when the middle classes take the leadership and organization of the masses, then the capitalist dictatorship either becomes more subtle or turns to Fascism. In the former case the real "illusions of democracy" are called into play. LaFollette measures, such as primaries, direct election of senators, and so on *ad nauseam*, are allowed to be written into the law, to quiet the masses with the belief that they have achieved some measure of control.

But is anything fundamentally changed by all this tinkering with the machinery of capitalist "democracy?" Not at all. It may happen that temporarily the lower sections of the capitalist class force a bit more recognition for their particular group interests, but whatever power they gain they immediately turn against the workers. The working class never gains anything of consequence for itself, although it really bears the brunt of all such struggles, except the incidental disillusionment which gradually forces it to begin to organize its own class forces, to mobilize itself as a class, to formulate its own program, and to realize the necessity of a break with the petty-bourgeoisie as it broke with the parties of big capital.



begin to act upon their own class policies, that they come to a fuller realization of the treacherous nature of this fake "democracy." In Germany, when hundreds of thousands of workers were thrown into violent conflict with their capitalist masters in the fall of 1923, and it seemed as though the capitalist system in that country must surely fall, it was the bearers of the "democratic illusion," the German Social Democracy, that turned the power over to the Ludendorffs, Hitlers, and the Fascist organizations, to rule the turbulent masses with machine guns and bombs. In England, when the transport workers were at the point of winning the demands of their strike, it was the "social pacifist," MacDonald, head of the British Labor party, who took the proclamation of martial law to the king for his signature, and thereby forced the workers to compromise. And in America we can confidently predict, with the full knowledge that the class interests controlling LaFollette will have their way with him, that in any great struggle of the workers that may arise when the LaFollette movement comes to power, the governmental powers will here also be turned against the workers or turned over to the Fascist elements in the United States.

Imperialism and LaFollettism.

Imperialist policy is the very keystone of modern capitalism. How little the LaFollettes, MacDonalds, Herriots, and Eberts endanger the capitalist dictatorship, what servile attendants they are upon the interests of their masters the capitalists, is witnessed by their care not to interfere in any way with the exploitation and suppression of colonial peoples. The middle class of each country is incapable of formulating, not to speak of carrying out, any policy that would interfere with the imperialist aims of its respective higher capitalist circles.

Perhaps our LaFollette enthusiasts may reply that the Wisconsin senator is an outspoken critic of American military adventures in South America, and that it is unfair to charge, in the absence of such action on his part, that he would serve American imperialism. But when we know that the pacifist MacDonald (who, by the way, opposed the world war with slightly more emphasis than LaFollette), once he was in office, proceeded to continue bombing defenseless natives in Irak, to handle India by forcible repression, that he continued imperialist intrigue in the Near East, and in every way continued the policies of British imperialism as established by the liberals and conservatives, it is not straining a point to expect that MacDonald's prototype in America, LaFollette, will follow the same course with regard to American imperialism. And when we further see Herriot, of France, continue the policy of the *Comite des Forges*, and of French imperialism in Africa, and French Indo-China, we have another reason for our belief. Further, when we consider that even the propaganda of the LaFollettites for the masses contains nothing but the most peurile sentimentalities, that Gompers, a big cog in the LaFollette machine, is an open defender of imperialism, that there is a complete absence of any program of action that would mobilize the resistance of the colonial peoples or crystallize the power of the working class against imperialism—then we know of a certainty that LaFollette and his kind are nothing but concealed imperialists, agents of capitalism in foreign affairs as they are at home.

Debauching the Working Class.

At this moment the masses in America are just entering upon a drunken debauch of democratic illusions, fed to them by the LaFollette movement. Blindly they were making their exit from the two old parties of capitalism, and just as blindly they allowed themselves to be led into the domain of the petty bourgeoisie. And in the accompanying flood of middle-class sentimentalism, there has been submerged what promised to be the beginnings of a mass party of workers and farmers upon a class basis, with a class program, the rising Farmer-Labor party movement. There can be no blinking the fact that the farmer-labor movement, as a mass movement distinct from the revolutionary (Communist) movement in this country, has been terrifically weakened, that its basis in the minds of millions of workers and farmers has been cut from under it, by the sweep of the LaFollette illusion.

Thus the slogan of the Labor Party has lost its power to stir the masses. That is because, while previous to this time it stood as the organizational expression for realization or, at least, struggle for some of the dimly felt needs of the masses—today the masses have, organizationally, come to rest in the LaFollette

movement. Before, they wanted a weapon to fight with. That is why the Labor Party slogan was powerful. Now they think they have the weapon in the LaFollette movement. They will insist upon trying to use it. Their ears will be closed to organizational slogans to the extent that they are under the spell of LaFollettism.

But if organizational slogans lose their keen edge in the period we are now entering, the opposite is true of slogans of immediate struggle, political and industrial issues of a single, burning, definite need felt by large masses. More than ever before in the history of the United States will it be possible to stir the millions of American workers and farmers, and lead them to demand and expect redress of these grievances. That is because they think that they have an instrument of their own, or at least very close to them, which will be used for their interests. That is an illusion. The LaFollette movement will fail them miserably. But the masses will not believe that only because the Communists tell them it is so—they will become disillusioned to the extent that issues are raised and pressed, issues on which the masses will demand action in their own interests, and against which the capitalist control over the LaFollette movement guarantees that it will set a flinty face.

What the Revolutionists Must Do.

The situation here outlined brings sharply to the fore the role of the Workers Party as the vanguard of the working class: We have two principal tasks: first, to assist the working class to cast off the influence of the LaFollette illusion, and second, to organize the disillusioned workers into the Workers Party as well as to unite them for the immediate struggle upon as wide a basis as possible. There is no organized force in the United States that can lead the struggle against the domination of the middle class over the labor movement, except the Communists organized in the Workers Party and the Trade Union Educational League.

In this struggle there is no possible substitute for the Workers Party. In the sea of reformism, opportunism, and petty-bourgeois muddle-headedness, nothing can possibly furnish a rallying center for the workers as they gradually become disillusioned except a clear-cut party of class struggle, with a program and policy that cuts a sharp line between it and the whole body of LaFollettism. It was always a dangerous tendency for revolutionists to yield to the idea that other organizations could substitute for the Workers Party in the immediate struggle. Today it is necessary to root out the idea completely.

Against the class-collaboration program of LaFollettism the only weapon that will cut deep will be the program of class struggle; against the conception

of parliamentary reformism, the only effective slogans will be those that mobilize the masses in the shops and factories for immediate struggle. In such a situation can we expect results from the use of any vague, abstract slogans and middle-of-the-road political organizations? It is absurd to think so. The most powerful weapon that we will have will be our own Workers Party. It was a growing realization of this fact that influenced greatly our decision to enter Communist candidates in the presidential election now upon us.

Direct Organs of Struggle.

All of the foregoing does not, for a single moment, minimize the importance of direct organs of struggle of the working class, particularly of the importance of the trade unions. On the contrary, for at the same time that the political leadership of the Workers Party becomes more predominant, at that time also the trade union struggle becomes more intense. Not only that, the cleavage within the trade unions, between the fossilized officialdom and the rank and file, will render necessary new forms of organization for the immediate struggle both against the employing class and against their agents, the union bureaucrats.

One of the most important of these forms, and one which will soon be playing an important role in the American labor movement, is the shop committee movement. The shop committees will furnish the basis for unifying the actions of organized and unorganized workers. They act as protective organs of the workers in the shops and factories, against aggression of the capitalists, against wage cuts, against lengthening of hours, against arbitrary changes in working rules, etc. At the same time, they furnish the necessary base for the struggle for unity and amalgamation of the trade unions, and against the splitting, class-collaboration tactics of the union officialdom.

Of even more importance, from a long range view, the shop committees give the mass basis for the political struggle against LaFollettism. Out of the struggle in the shops and factories, crystallized in the shop committees, and out of the masses of unemployed, who must be united into unemployed councils connected with trade unions and shop committees, will come the issues upon which the masses will break with their treacherous middle-class leaders. And it is therefore precisely in the centre of these direct organs of struggle against the exploitation of capitalism that the Workers Party must plant its banner, must mobilize its forces, must send forth its slogans, and win by virtue of its superior program, its wiser leadership, its better fighting qualities, the leadership of the American working class for the revolutionary struggle.