

---

# The Labor Party Campaign:

## An Excerpt from the Report of the Central Executive Committee to the Third National Convention of the Workers Party of America.

by C.E. Ruthenberg

Published in *The Second Year of the Workers Party of America: Report of the Central Executive Committee to the Third National Convention: Held in Chicago, Illinois, Dec. 30, 31, 1923 and Jan. 1, 2, 1924: Theses, Program, Resolutions.* (Chicago: Literature Dept., Workers Party of America, 1924), pp. 15-26.

### Before the July 3rd Convention.

The campaign for a Labor Party was initiated prior to the Second National Convention, and the first action in this campaign in the form of the effort to seat our delegates in the Conference for Progressive Political Action at Cleveland [Dec. 11-12, 1922] took place just prior to the last national convention [Dec. 24-26]. Even in its action in this instance the Party increased its prestige and political influence. It was in the effort to seat our delegates in the Conference for Progressive Political Action that our Party first appeared as a political factor in this country.

In the Conference for Progressive Political Action the caucus of the Farmer-Labor Party had voted to support the seating of the Workers Party delegation. After the convention was over, however, when the Labor Party Resolution was defeated in this convention, the National Committee of the Farmer Labor Party, disgusted by the reactionary tendencies of the Conference for Progressive Political Action, decided to withdraw from that body.† When the Central Executive Committee of the Party learned of this proposal, it expressed to the Farmer-Labor Party its opposition to such a move, arguing that the Farmer-Labor Party should remain within the Conference for Progressive Political Action at least until its next convention and make an open fight for the Labor Party

there and if possible take with it out of that convention all those groups which favored the organization of a Labor Party. However, the National Committee of the Farmer-Labor Party voted to withdraw and this organization severed its connection with the Conference for Progressive Political Action.

### Policy in the July 3rd Convention.

The next move of the Farmer-Labor Party was to issue a call for a National Conference on July 3rd, to which were to [\*\*\* missing text in original \*\*\*] organization of a Farmer-Labor Party. When the CEC received this information from the National Committee of the Farmer-Labor Party, it immediately accepted and pledged its support to make the July 3rd Convention a success.

From the beginning of the campaign for the July 3rd Convention there was close cooperation between the Farmer-Labor Party and the CEC. The Executive Secretary of the Party [C.E. Ruthenberg] held a number of conferences with the Secretary of the Farmer-Labor Party at which the plans for the campaign were formulated. Our Party did not only give its support as an organization but it assisted in financing the work of printing and sending out the call for the convention.

During these conferences between the Farmer-

†- The delegates Second National Conference of the CPPA defeated a proposal by five representatives of the Farmer-Labor Party which called for "independent political action by the agricultural and industrial workers through a party of their own" by a vote of 52 to 64. Instead, a resolution against the establishment of an independent political party was adopted, with progressive change envisioned to take place via the ballot box during the various primary elections of the Democratic and Republican Parties. In response, the Farmer-Labor Party withdrew from participation in the CPPA in order to pursue the Third Party tactic in its own name.

Labor Party and the representative of the CEC, it was agreed from the very beginning that prior to the July 3rd Convention there would be a conference between the Committee representing the Farmer-Labor Party and a Committee representing the CEC of the WP for the purpose of agreeing upon a program for the July 3rd conference.

Sometime early in June it appeared, however, that the Farmer-Labor Party had lost some of its enthusiasm for the July 3rd conference. The Farmer-Labor Party had expected that some of the International Unions and the SP would respond to this call,<sup>†</sup> but found that these organizations were tied up with the reactionary Conference for Progressive Political Action or even with the Gompers Machine were not going to send delegates to the Convention. It appeared from the viewpoint of the representatives of the Farmer-Labor Party expressed that John Fitzpatrick of the Chicago Federation of Labor appeared to be allied with the Workers Party in a federated farmer labor party which would include local unions, central bodies, and farm organizations and would not include the international unions and the SP. At a conference early in the month of June [1923] the representatives of the Farmer Labor Party proposed that in place of organizing a federated farmer labor party at the July 3rd Conference only an Organization Committee should be created in which the Workers Party and all other national organizations would be represented while the local unions and central bodies would be affiliated with the existing Farmer-Labor Party.

This proposal was reported to the Central Executive Committee and considered by it. It was the decision of the CEC that if a sufficient number of workers were represented at the July 3rd Conference the Party delegates would have to fight for the organization of a federated farmer labor party, and it was the view of the Committee that if a half million workers were represented that would be a sufficient basis for the creation of a federated farmer labor party. The

Committee decided that if the fight were made for the labor party and we were defeated we would accept the Organization Committee as a compromise.

A sub-committee of the CEC was sent to Chicago two weeks before the July 3rd Conference for the purpose of carrying on official negotiations with the Farmer-Labor Party in regard to the working program for the July 3rd Conference. This Committee met with a Committee of the Farmer-Labor Party. In the conference it was agreed by the representatives of the Farmer-Labor Party that if the representation at the July 3rd Convention was sufficient (and it was considered that if there were a half million workers represented that it would be a sufficient number) a federated farmer labor party should be formed. It was agreed that a National Executive Committee of the federated farmer labor party so formed should be elected by the Convention in place of the existing National Committee of the Farmer-Labor Party based upon state representation. It was agreed that the structure of the Farmer-Labor Party should be used as the structure for the new federated farmer labor party. It was agreed that the Conference should pass a resolution containing a general statement of principles and a resolution for the recognition of Soviet Russia.

It was on the basis of this agreement that the CEC and the delegates of our Party went to the July 3rd Convention. At no time prior to the Convention did the Farmer-Labor Party repudiate this agreement which it had entered into with the representatives of the Workers Party.

During the two days prior to the opening of the July 3rd Conference the representatives of the CEC who formed the steering committee of our Party endeavored to continue the conference with the Farmer Labor Party and made repeated efforts to arrange a conference with John Fitzpatrick, who it appeared, was opposing the plan which the Farmer-Labor Party representatives had agreed to. But these efforts for such a conference were fruitless.

<sup>†</sup>- The delegates of the Socialist Party and a few radical representatives of trade unions voted with the Farmer-Labor Party for the establishment of a third party at the Dec. 1922 Cleveland Conference of the CPPA. Bitterly disappointed, the FLP disaffiliated from the CPPA after the failure of the Cleveland Conference to move towards establishment of a Third Party. The FLP counted upon the Socialists and their union allies favoring a third party on the model of the British Labor Party to follow their lead. However, on May 20, 1923, the SPA after length debate voted 38-12 at its annual convention to retain its affiliation with the CPPA and to continue its efforts at formation of a third party from within that group. This decision immediately changed the dynamics of the forthcoming July 3rd Farmer-Labor Party Convention.

Prior to the opening of the July 3rd Conference the question arose as to which delegates would be seated in the preliminary Farmer Labor Party Convention. The steering committee of the CEC sent a letter to the National Committee of the Farmer-Labor Party stating as its view that only delegates from bona fide affiliated organizations of the FLP should be seated in the preliminary convention and received in reply assurance from the FLP that it agreed with this principle and would put it into effect.

Much to the surprise of the steering committee of the CEC, when the convention opened, the credentials committee, entirely made up of representatives of the FLP, brought in a report seating all the delegates present. The steering committee of the CEC was ready to accept this decision but during the process of debate on the question amendments were made which would have seated all the local unions and central labor body delegates not affiliated with the FLP but would have excluded the Workers Party and a number of international organizations. The steering committee could not permit such isolation of our delegates and therefore insisted that either all the delegates be seated or only the bona fide Farmer-Labor Party delegates as per the agreement previously made. The motion of the steering committee for the seating of all delegates was carried in the convention.

During the proceedings of the convention which followed the steering committee made repeated efforts to come to a new agreement with the Farmer-Labor Party. In the Organization Committee which was elected, the Farmer-Labor Party representation was asked to state what they desired the convention to do on the question of organization. After the Resolution Committee had worked out an organization plan the steering committee made another effort for a conference with John Fitzpatrick, and the opening of the morning session of the convention was held up for several hours in the hope that such a conference could be arranged, but again our efforts were fruitless.

During the debate on the organization plan submitted by the Organization Committee, Comrade Ruthenberg took the floor and in a speech made in the name of the steering committee asked the Farmer-Labor Party delegates what they wish, and that if they would submit their plan to the convention that we would agree to any concessions except that involving

the sacrifice of the organization of a federated farmer labor party. Our committee even went so far as to provide in the organization plan for five representatives of the Farmer-Labor Party in the National Executive Committee although the Workers Party was only granted two representatives. The Farmer-Labor Party in response to Comrade Ruthenberg's speech, asked for a recess of the convention and for an opportunity to caucus. While the caucus was going on, our steering committee informed the representatives of the Farmer-Labor Party that it would be glad to send representatives to the caucus to discuss any question at issue and to come to an agreement, but this offer was not accepted.

The result of the caucus of the Farmer-Labor Party was that the Farmer-Labor Party delegates brought in a resolution proposing to exclude the Workers Party from the conference and ask the conference to accept the 1921 program and constitution of the Farmer-Labor Party. This, of course, was impossible of acceptance by our steering committee and the proposal was laid on the table by 500 delegates voting against about 40, and the organization plan and statement of principles proposed by the organization committee was adopted and the Federated Farmer-Labor Party organized.

We believe that the facts as outlined above show that the CEC made every effort possible to avoid the split at the July 3rd Conference and that it was the fact that John Fitzpatrick had gotten "cold feet" because of fear of the Gompers machine that caused the split of the July 3rd Conference.

### **Labor Party Policy After the July 3rd Conference.**

Immediately after the July 3rd Conference the CEC launched a campaign to assist in the organization of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. There had been represented in the July 3rd Convention more than 600,000 organized workers and the problem was to secure the affiliation of the organizations represented with the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. The instructions sent to our Party units were to raise the issue of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party in all local unions, and endeavor to secure a vote of affiliation. In those cities in which the conditions were ripe the Party units were directed to take the initiative to form a Commit-

tee for the organization of a branch of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party in which all local unions, fraternal organizations, and political organizations would be refused [*sic.*?], provided that the support secured was in a ratio of ten to one of the members of our Party.

A few weeks later it appeared that the barrage of misrepresentation and lies carried by the capitalist press and the Gompers Labor press in regard to the July 3rd Convention was having an influence on the work of organizing the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. The CEC considered that under these conditions it was necessary to modify the original instructions to our Party in this work in support of the Federated and adopt a resolution which provided that in carrying on this work we should endeavor:

(a) To secure affiliation wherever possible.

(b) To secure endorsements of the Federated where affiliation could not be secured.

(c) To secure delegates to the next convention of the Federated where neither affiliation nor endorsement could be secured.

At a meeting of the CEC about the middle of August, the whole question of our work in support of the Federated was raised and thoroughly discussed. As a result of this discussion the CEC adopted a twofold policy so far as its relations with the Federated Farmer-Labor Party was concerned.

(a) That our support of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party must take the form of assisting the organization of the Federated and that an organization campaign and organization work to build branches of the Federated must be initiated wherever conditions were ripe.

(b) That in addition the Federated Farmer-Labor Party must consider this as an instrument for the work of propaganda and organization for a larger united front and must carry on a campaign in those organizations not ready to affiliate with the Federated for the idea of a united front Labor Party.

Since the August meeting the CEC, this policy has been in force and has been successfully applied. The CEC, during the period between the August meeting and the present time, has adopted policies for a score of dissimilar situations in various parts of the United States. On the left there has been the policy of assisting the organization of the Federated Farmer-

Labor Party as in the case of New York City and Washington County, Pennsylvania. Where strong branches of the Federated have been brought into existence there has been the policy of securing endorsements for the Federated; there has been the policy of securing delegates for the next convention of the Federated; and in some instances, as in the case of Massachusetts, there has been the policy of carrying on an educational campaign for a united front Labor Party without any reference to the Federated Farmer-Labor Party.

The CEC believes that a close examination of all the details of these policies in relation to the Federated Farmer-Labor Party and the Labor Party issue since the August policy was adopted will not show a single instance in which a mistake has been made. The policy of the CEC has been elastic enough to fit itself to each individual situation and to secure for the Party the greatest results from each such situation.

#### **Our Present Position in Relation to the Federated and a United Front Labor Party.**

On the basis of the present situation of our Party in relation to the Labor Party movement in this country, the CEC declares its belief that the organization of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party at the July 3rd Convention has greatly strengthened the position of the Workers Party. Through the maneuvers carried on by our Party directly and by the Federated Farmer-Labor Party with our assistance, our Party is now in a position which makes it impossible to challenge our leadership in the Labor Party movement. The Federated Farmer-Labor Party, although it has secured the affiliation of but 155,000 of the 600,000 organized workers represented in the July 3rd Conference, enjoys a greater influence and prestige than the number of officially affiliated members would indicate. It has built for itself a position of powerful influence upon the whole Labor Party movement and its connections extend to practically every part of the country in which there is a Labor Party movement. On the basis of these facts and our cooperation in bringing about this situation, the CEC believes that its view that the July 3rd Conference and its results were a very great victory for our Party cannot be successfully challenged.

During the last two months, following out the policy declared in the August statement and reiterated

in the November thesis submitted to this convention for approval that our Party must assist the Federated in bringing into existence a greater united front Labor Party, the Federated Farmer-Labor Party has entered into an agreement with the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota, the Farmer-Labor Party of Washington, the Progressive Party of Idaho, and the Committee of 48 for a convention to be held in the Twin Cities of Minnesota on May 30th for the nomination of a candidate for President and Vice President and adoption of a national platform. Thus the Central Executive Committee is able to present to the convention a successful culmination of this policy of assisting in making the Federated Farmer-Labor Party the nucleus for a greater united front Labor Party.

### **The Chicago Situation.**

While everywhere in the country except in Chicago the results of the July 3rd Conference immensely strengthened our influence, in the city of Chicago the reverse was true. It was in the city of Chicago that the Fitzpatrick group which bolted the July 3rd Conference had its greatest influence and it was in that city that our organization had to meet the full brunt of the attack of this disgruntled element. In order to fully present the development in Chicago and to draw for the Party the lesson of that development for its future guidance, it is necessary to review the whole situation in that city so far as our united front policy is concerned.

For a considerable period before the July 3rd Conference there was an informal united front relationship between the so-called "progressive" leaders of the Chicago Federation of Labor and our Party organization. It is argued and correctly that this united front was the basis for the launching of a nationwide scale of the "Amalgamation" and "Labor Party" campaigns of the Party. Undoubtedly the fact that these policies secured the support of the Chicago Federation of Labor through the influence of the Fitzpatrick group helped materially in carrying on a successful campaign for these issues.

It appears, however, that there was a fundamental weakness in our policy in the Chicago situation for after the July 3rd Conference, in place of being able to hold in the hands of our Party a section of organized

workers, we found our influence limited to those unions in which there was a clear-cut sentiment for Communism and which our members represented in the Chicago Federation of Labor.

We did not during the process of united front build up our independent power and when the crisis came we were left only with those groups of workers who have come fully under our direct influence.

During the process of the development of the united front campaign in Chicago, the Central Executive Committee came in conflict with the District Committee on a number of issues. The first case of this character was in relation to the United Front Manifesto issued by the Party to which the District Committee objected on the ground that it made one of the demands of the United Front the opposition to the Second International. The Central Executive Committee took this matter up with the District Committee in detail, explained its position, and its view was finally accepted by the District Committee.

The question of the relationship of the District Committee to the negotiations with the Farmer-Labor Party prior to the July 3rd Convention has also been raised as an issue in the Party and it has been charged that the Central Executive Committee objected to the Chicago comrades maintaining a close contact with the Farmer-Labor Party group prior to the July 3rd Convention. In order that this issue may be clearly presented to the convention, we quote the following letters sent by the Executive Secretary [C.E. Ruthenberg] to the organizer of the Chicago District, Arne Swabeck, in reply to a communication from Comrade Cannon endorsed by the members of the District Executive Committee.

Your letter informing me of the action of the District Executive Committee in regard to the United Front policy of the Party has been received. I will present this letter to the Political Committee, which will close the incident.

In regard to the July 3rd Conference, Comrade Cannon's letter was considered by the Executive Council of the Party and it is the decision of that body that a conference will be held with the representatives of the Farmer-Labor Party on or about June 12th as has been the plan from the very beginning of our work in favor of the Labor Party Conference. We have no need for permanent representation in Chicago at the present time and feel sure that all the matters pertaining to the convention can be handled best at the proposed conference in June

The above is written in view of my personal interview with Jay Brown on last Monday during which there did not

develop the slightest friction of any character or anything that needed to be straightened out between our organizations. In fact, Brown congratulated me upon the circular letter which I had sent out instructing our Party members how to conduct the work for the Labor Party convention. This letter, by the way, instructed our branches as to the number of delegates we would elect.

Fraternally,  
Executive Secretary.

June 4, 1923

It is the view of the Executive Council of the Party that the situation in regard to the Labor Party Convention can be seriously muddled up should there be any negotiations with the representatives of the Farmer-Labor Party conducted by comrades in Chicago. It, therefore, strongly recommends that in discussing the questions which may arise, the representatives of the Party in official positions in Chicago, particularly Swabeck, Browder, and Krumbein, shall merely secure information to be transmitted to the national office and considered by the Political Committee and not to discuss any details in regard to arrangements which might be made.

The above does not, of course, apply to the convention of the Farmer-Labor Party which is to be held on June 11th as it is the duty of the Chicago comrades to take all the necessary steps to work out the details of what is to be done in this convention so as to protect the interests of our organization in relation to the coming convention on July 3.

Please submit this letter to the comrades in question and also to the District Executive Committee.

Fraternally yours,  
Executive Secretary.

It will be clearly seen from the above letters that the Central Executive Committee desired the Chicago comrades to keep in close contact and secure all the information possible and only reserved for itself the right to make any decision in regard to the Party policy.

The Central Executive Committee was also obliged to correct the policies of the Chicago district in relation to the Federated Farmer-Labor Party after the July 3rd Convention. The District Executive Committee sent out a circular letter in which there appeared the following quotation:

1. The Chicago local Federated Farmer-Labor Party must be organized immediately by obtaining the affiliation of all local unions, fraternal organizations, from which the Farmer-Labor Party City Central Committee will be formed.

2. Our attitude toward the Farmer-Labor Party is to be that we will not encourage any immediate conflict either with the officials of the old Farmer-Labor Party or in the unions that have been up until now affiliated with that party.

3. **If the conflict is forced upon us, either by an attack on the Federated Farmer-Labor Party by the officials of the Farmer-Labor Party or in any union now affiliated**

**with the Farmer-Labor Party, we will fight for the new party.**

The Central Executive Committee, upon receipt of these instructions, issued the following statement to the District Executive Committee correcting them:

That we instruct the Chicago district to carry on **an aggressive campaign to secure the affiliation of all unions in Chicago with the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, irrespective of any previous affiliation.** This is to be conducted under the slogan of "Unity in the Federated Farmer-Labor Party of all Labor Organizations for Independent Political Action." It should be pointed out that the Federated Farmer-Labor Party consistently followed the policy of unifying the forces of labor and that it is the old Farmer-Labor Party which is bringing about disunity.

There should be no personal attacks on Fitzpatrick and others in this campaign. Rather their past attitude should be held up in contradistinction to their present viewpoint. They were for a Labor Party at the Cleveland Conference, they were for seating the Workers Party in the Labor Party, why are they against the Labor Party and against the Workers Party now?

The Chicago district should at once instruct its branches on the policies decided upon by the Central Executive Committee and see that every Party branch and every Party member carries out these policies.

Fraternally yours,  
Executive Secretary.

Before the receipt of the letter from the Central Executive Committee the Chicago district had sent out a new circular to the branches in which it itself changed the paragraphs above, to read as follows:

**In every local union not now affiliated to the old Farmer-Labor Party our members must organize for this campaign of immediate affiliation** with the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, basing their arguments upon the merits of the party itself, the numerous groups and organizations represented, its statements of principles and program, and the party as an actual live expression of united political action by the working class.

In unions now affiliated to the old Farmer-Labor Party our members must organize for an aggressive campaign of propaganda for the new party, preparing the ground for affiliation at the earliest possible date. Their arguments should likewise be based upon the merits of the party and any possible attacks of domination by the "reds," "advocacy of force and violence," or "connections with the Third International" should not be dodged but met in the same manner in which these were handled by the July 3rd Convention. The actual status and strength of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party should be compared to that of the split up, bankrupt old Farmer-Labor Party.

The Central Executive Committee replied to the

second instruction as follows:

Your letter enclosing a new statement to the membership in your district in regard to the Federated Farmer-Labor Party has been received. This statement seems to be in harmony with the instructions I sent you upon direction of the Political Committee excepting as to paragraph two, which suggests only the preparation of the ground for affiliation of unions formerly affiliated with the Farmer-Labor Party. This should be changed to read to instruct the Party membership in these unions to carry on an aggressive struggle to have them immediately affiliated with the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. I think also that the ground should be prepared as quickly as possible for the calling of a convention in Cook County of the organizations supporting the Federated Party for the purpose of organizing a Chicago local of the Federated Party. Our course, we do now want to call such a convention until we are certain of substantial support and the date will depend to a large extent upon how many organizations affiliate with the Federated Party.

Fraternally yours,  
Executive Secretary.

It will appear from the above that the Central Executive Committee's instructions in this instance were shown to be correct guidance of the District Executive Committee in view of the fact that the District Executive Committee itself acknowledged its original error by sending out the second circular.

*Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.  
Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.*