
LaFollette and the Communists.

The Statement of Robert LaFollette on Communist Participation in the Progressive Movement, May 26, 1924.

Published in *The Facts: LaFollette-Wheeler Campaign Text-Book.*
(Chicago: LaFollette-Wheeler Campaign Committee, 1924), pp. 125-127.

The following letter written by Senator LaFollette and published throughout the country, presents in clear and forceful language his attitude toward the Communists and every other group which seeks to attain its ends by force and violence.

Atlantic City, NJ, 26 May, 1924

Hon. Herman L. Ekern
Attorney General
Madison, Wisconsin

My dear Mr. Ekern:

I have your letter of May 17th saying that many of my friends in Wisconsin are anxious to know my attitude toward the "Farmer-Labor-Progressive Convention" called to meet at St. Paul, June 17th.

I should not feel it incumbent upon me to declare my attitude except that my name is being used by the promoters of that Convention in such a way as to convey the impression that it has my approval and as a result some of my friends in different parts of the country contemplate attending the St. Paul Convention. Because of these facts, I feel it my duty to state my view frankly.

I have no doubt that very many of those who have participated in bringing about the St. Paul Convention have been actuated by the purest desire to promote genuine political and economic progress.

Nevertheless, in my judgment, the June 17th Convention will not command the support of the farmers, the workers, or other Progressives because those who have had charge of the arrangements for this Convention have committed the fatal error of making the Communists an integral part of their organization.

The Communists have admittedly entered into this political movement not for the purpose of curing, by means of the ballot, the evils which afflict the American people, but only to divide and confuse the Progressive movement and create a condition of chaos favorable to their ultimate aims. Their real purpose is to establish by revolutionary action a dictatorship of the proletariat, which is absolutely

repugnant to democratic ideals and to all American aspirations. The official declarations of the Workers Party show clearly that they are seeking to use the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota and other Progressive organizations that have lent their names to this Convention as a means of advancing their own ends.

This is shown by an official statement of the Central Executive Committee of the Workers Party of America as follows:

The policy which we adopt in Minnesota will be a precedent for the who party in relation to the National Farmer-Labor Party when that organization is finally crystallized. It is therefore important that we adopt the correct Communist policy in Minnesota as a guide to our whole party for its *work inside of the Farmer-Labor Party throughout the country.* * * *

The Workers Party prides itself in being a Communist Party; that means, that *it considers its work to build up and lead the forces which will bring about a proletarian revolution in the United States and establish a Soviet form of government and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.*

Central Executive Committee,
C.E. Ruthenberg, Secretary.

Progressives inclined to attend the June 17th Convention should also consider the statement, published in The Daily Worker of May 16, 1924, by the Central Executive Committee of the Workers Party of America over the signatures of William Z. Foster, Chairman, and C.E. Ruthenberg, Executive Secretary:

In order to settle the question of whether the Farmer-Labor United Front was a policy that a Communist Party such as the Workers Party should put into effect and in support of which it should throw all its strength, the Central

Executive Committee of the Workers Party submitted this question to the Communist International (Moscow), with which it is affiliated as a fraternal organization.

The view of the Communist International on this question is expressed in the following cablegram:

“Communist International considers June 17th Convention momentous importance for Workers Party. Urges CEC not to slacken activities preparation June 17th. Utilize every available force to make St. Paul Convention great representative gathering labor and left wing.

Executive Committee, Communist International”

The Communist organization in America, thus acting under orders from the Communist International at Moscow, will not only participate in the St. Paul Convention of June 17th, but has already secured a strategic position in the direction of that Convention. C.A. Hathaway, the Secretary-Treasurer of the Committee on Arrangements for the St. Paul Convention, is an avowed Communist, and was a delegate to its third national convention, held in Chicago, December 30, 1923. All credentials for the St. Paul Convention are made returnable to Hathaway as Secretary, and as Treasurer he controls its funds. Joseph Manley, son-in-law of William Z. Foster and an avowed Communist, is also a member of the Committee on Arrangements.

Although the national Communist organization as such may be granted only five delegates in the St. Paul Convention, the basis of representation adopted is lending itself to their purpose of control. Reliable information shows that a very large number of Communist delegates will be present at St. Paul with duly authorized credentials.

Reposing complete confidence in the soundness of the deliberate judgment of the American people, I have no apprehension that the Communist Party can ever command any considerable support in this country. I do not question their right, under the Constitution, to submit their issues to the people, but I most emphatically protest against their being admitted into the councils of any body of Progressive voters. The Communists stand for the substitution of the Soviet form of government for the one we now have and propose to accomplish this change through a revolution, with a class dictatorship as their ultimate aim instead of a democracy. To pretend that the Communists can work with the Progressives who believe in democracy is deliberately to deceive the public. The Communists are antagonistic to the Progressive cause and their only purpose in joining such a movement is to disrupt it.

Not only are the Communists the mortal enemies of the Progressive movement and democratic ideals, but, under the cloak of such extremists, the reactionary interests find their best opportunity to plant their spies and provocatory agents for the purpose of confusing and destroying true progressive movements.

I have devoted many years of my life to an effort to solve the problems which confront the American people by the ballot and not by force. I believe that the people, through the ballot, can completely control their government in every branch and compel it to serve them effectively. I have fought steadfastly to achieve this end, and I shall not abandon this fight as long as I may live. I believe, therefore, that all Progressives should refuse to participate in any movement which makes common cause with any Communist organization.

There is no doubt that the people have come to understand that private monopoly controls the official machinery of both the Democratic and Republican Parties. Recent public scandals, such as the War Frauds, the Shipping Board, Teapot Dome and other oil leases, the Veterans' Bureau, the Alien Property Custodian, the degradation of the Department of Justice under both Democratic and Republican Administrations, and the endless fraud and corruption in connection with taxation and prohibition enforcement, are but evidences of such control of party machinery by lawless and predatory interests.

The approaching Democratic and Republican conventions will demonstrate to the people whether either of those parties can and will purge itself of the evil influences which have long dominated them. This cannot be accomplished by merely nominating some alleged Progressive and filling the platform with misleading promises. It demands the elimination of monopoly control, the downfall of the corrupt political bosses, the adoption of truly Progressive principles, and the repudiation of those great campaign contributors who have in the past bought up both parties.

If this is not done, a long suffering and righteously indignant people will find in the coming campaign effective means, independent both these old parties, to take back control of their government and make it truly representative.

Sincerely yours,

Robert M. LaFollette

*Edited by Tim Davenport. Introductory paragraph appears in the original.
© 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2004. • Free reproduction permitted.*