

---

# Workers and Farmers on the Mark.

by C.E. Ruthenberg

Published in *The Liberator*, v. 7, no. 7, whole no. 75, pp. 16-19, 20-21.

There is developing today in the United States a mass movement which has as its objective the overthrow of the capitalist system. This is the important fact emphasized by the June 17 Convention — the Farmer-Labor Convention.

There were more than 500 delegates who sat in this convention. These delegates came from the farms of the Northwest, from the agricultural lands of the West and the South; they came from the Pacific coast and from the industrial states of the Middle West and East. These delegates unanimously adopted a platform which declares that it is the purpose of the Farmer-Labor Party to take over the government in the interests of the farmers and industrial workers and “to end the existing system of exploitation and the rule of the privileged class.”

The convention adopted an organizational plan to build up a mass Farmer-Labor Party to carry on the struggle for the achievement of that goal.

## **The Convention at Work.**

Delegates from 26 states sat in the convention. In 16 of the 26 states from which delegates came to the convention, Farmer-Labor Parties have been organized. On a national scale there were represented the Workers Party of America, the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, the World War Veterans, the Young Workers League, and the Amalgamated Metal Workers; and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers sent five delegates to act as observers for that organization.

William Mahoney, chairman of the Arrangements Committees, opened the convention as temporary chairman. The reception given his keynote speech showed clearly from the beginning what this convention wanted. Every reference to the organization of a

strong Farmer-Labor Party was enthusiastically applauded, while the mention of Robert M. LaFollette as a possible candidate for the presidency was greeted either by profound silence or a scattering applause which indicated even more clearly how small was the support for LaFollette in this convention.

The issue raised in Mahoney’s opening address as to whether the convention had assembled to organize a strong party to fight the battles of the industrial workers and farmers or whether it was merely to be some sort of appendage to LaFollette’s campaign for the presidency was the outstanding issue of the convention.

The first struggle over this issue took place in the election of the permanent chairman of the convention. Charles E. Taylor of Montana, known as a staunch supporter of the Farmer-Labor Party, and William Mahoney were nominated for permanent presiding officer. Mahoney had made clear both in his opening speech and in preliminary negotiations before the convention that he laid more stress upon the convention endorsing and supporting the presidential aspirations of LaFollette than upon the organization of a national Farmer-Labor Party through this convention. After first declining to stand as a candidate for permanent presiding officer, he allowed his supporters to place him in nomination against Taylor. The result was over 700 votes for Taylor, with 161 for Mahoney, the vote being by states, each state casting the number of votes allotted to it by the call for the convention. Even Minnesota, Mahoney’s own state, cast the majority of its vote for Taylor.

Three committees were to be elected by the convention; one on organization plan, one on platform, one on candidates. The cumbersome method of voting in the convention by allotted state votes made the

elections of committees by the convention as a whole very difficult and a motion was carried to have state delegations elect one member of the committee. In order to permit state delegations to caucus and make their selections the convention adjourned until the next day.

### **The Second Day.**

The center of struggle on the second day moved from the floor of the convention to the sessions of the three committees which were considering separately the questions of platform, organization plan, and candidates. Each of the committees found a difference of viewpoint among its members; the platform committee had to deal with those delegates who wanted a platform satisfactory to Senator LaFollette; the organization committee had to deal with the proposal that the convention take no definite steps toward the organization of the national Farmer-Labor Party, but carry on its work as a coalition and endeavor to organize the Party elections; the candidates committee had to face the question whether the convention should stamp itself as a LaFollette convention and merely endorse his candidacy as an independent candidate or whether it should nominate its own candidates and go into the fight definitely as a Farmer-Labor Party.

Early in the second day's proceedings a newspaper correspondent furnished the convention with one of the most enlivening incidents of the whole three days' proceedings. Some 25 correspondents sat on the platform. They petitioned the convention, saying that inasmuch as the convention call provided that a group of 25 voters might send a delegate, they asked to be represented and announced that they had elected Robert Minor, correspondent for the *Daily Worker*, as their delegate. The convention voted to seat Minor and called upon him for a speech.

The joke of the correspondents, if it was intended as such, was quickly turned against them. Probably no group of newspaper representatives have sat through such an excoriation of the capitalist press as that which these correspondents and the delegates listened to during Minor's speech. Beginning with an apology for the men of his profession, he pictured the whole machinery of misrepresentation, lying, distortion, etc., as illustrated in the treatment of the convention by the

local press. The delegates responded by the stormiest applause of the entire convention, while the press correspondents sat shamefacedly on the platform.

The convention passed the day in listening to speeches while the committees worked. It was not until the evening session that the first committee report came in. This was from the committee on platform. Chairman Joseph Manley stated the committee, with a membership of some 25, brought in a report agreed to by all but one member. Had the chairman put the question to a vote immediately after the report of the committee, the platform would undoubtedly have been adopted with practically no dissenting vote. However, E.R. Meitzen of Texas secured the floor to protest against the clause calling for the abolition of all Jim Crow laws directed against the Negroes. Meitzen stated that he was for political and economic equality for the Negroes, but that the clause in question would arouse great prejudice in the South and make organization there very difficult. He was ably answered by J. Stanley Clark of Missouri, who supported the report of the committee, and by Otto Huiswood, the only Negro delegate in the convention, who spoke at length for the committee report and was loudly applauded.

The discussion of the Negro plank gave the delegates who had "pet planks" which they desired to incorporate in the platform the opportunity to get their second breath, before the platform was adopted and that the document be printed so that all the delegates could have copies. Walter Thomas Mills made a demand for a brief platform on immediate issues in place of a document dealing with fundamentals, such as the committee had brought in. While the great majority of the delegates stood for the adoption of the platform as it was reported, it was considered best to permit the widest discussion and opportunity to amend, and the motion to print, and to hold another session of the committee was unanimously adopted.

### **Organization Plan.**

The report of the committee on organization followed. It was presented by William Mahoney and represented the unanimous viewpoint of the entire committee. Two plans had come before the committee; one providing for a detailed statement of the organizational structure of the Farmer-Labor Party and

the other for a loose form of coalition for the election campaign. The reports of the committee represented a compromise between the two viewpoints.

The opening paragraph of the document place the convention on record as declaring for the formation of a national Farmer-Labor Party. A National Organization and Campaign Committee consisting of two delegates from each national organization, was provided for. This National Committee is given power to elect a National Chairman and Secretary and National Executive Committee consisting of five members besides the National Chairman and Secretary. The National Committee is also charged with the duty of conducting the 1924 presidential campaign and with the work of organizing state Farmer-Labor Parties in all the states of the union.

The final clause of the organization report read:

“The National Organization and Campaign Committee is authorized to carry on negotiations with any other group which favors the organization of a National Farmer-Labor Party with a view of uniting upon a single set of candidates and a platform and to give such groups representation upon the National Organization and Campaign Committee.”

The organizational plan was adopted by the convention by a unanimous vote and the second day's session adjourned.

### **The Third Day.**

Delegate Froelich took the floor to make the report of the majority of the Committee on Candidates. It consisted of a three-line declaration that the convention immediately proceed with the nomination of candidates for President and Vice President. Delegate Taylor, better known as “Crook-Neck Taylor” of Nebraska, presented a minority report calling for the endorsement of Senator LaFollette for President.

Delegate Clark of Missouri submitted an amendment as a substitute for the majority and minority report putting the convention on record as declaring that the National Committee to be elected was authorized to support the candidacy of Senator LaFollette if he ran on the Farmer-Labor Party ticket, accepted the platform adopted by the convention, and accepted the control by the National Committee of the campaign and funds.

The big issue of the convention was out in the open. The other issues had been but preliminary to this, the dominating question, whether the convention was a Farmer-Labor convention or a LaFollette convention. William Mahoney took the floor to state that he had received a request from the personal representative of Senator LaFollette that his name should not be presented to the convention and that he did not want an endorsement or any action by the convention on his candidacy. Delegate Taylor of Nebraska, however, refused to withdraw his minority report for endorsement of LaFollette.

Benjamin Gitlow secured the floor and launched into an attack upon LaFollette, showing by his record in Congress and his record in Wisconsin that he was not a representative of exploited farmers and workers and had not fought their political battles. He was followed by C.E. Ruthenberg. Mahoney had stated in his speech that the Organization Committee report in authorizing the National Committee to agree with the other Farmer-Labor groups upon candidates and platforms left the way open for the nomination of LaFollette after July 4th. Ruthenberg answered Mahoney on this point, calling attention to the fact that the clause in question read Farmer-Labor groups and that it was inserted in order that an agreement might be reached with a group which might split away from the Conference of Progressive Political Action after July 4th and not for the purpose of leaving a loophole for the nomination of LaFollette.

At this point the convention adjourned for the luncheon recess.

At the opening of the afternoon session, Delegate Clark, who had made the motion authorizing the National Committee to accept the candidacy of LaFollette on condition of his running on the Farmer-Labor ticket, accepting its program and control of the National Committee, withdrew his amendment. It had evidently been decided by those who opposed the candidacy of LaFollette that it would be better to vote down the Taylor minority report for an endorsement of LaFollette and adopt the majority report of the committee to proceed with nominations, and thus make a clear record, than to have the Clark motion carried.

Taylor of Nebraska took the floor at this point and made a long harangue against the Communists in the convention. After his speech, Delegate Cramer of

Minneapolis moved that both the Clark amendment already withdrawn and the Taylor minority report be laid on the table. This motion was carried with practically no opposition and the majority report, providing for immediate nomination by the convention, adopted. During the final discussion of the question William Mahoney again raised the point that the Organization Plan made possible the withdrawal of the candidates nominated by the convention and the endorsement of LaFollette's candidacy, and in order to make clear the position of the Workers Party, William Z. Foster made the following statement:

"In view of the statement just made by Mr. Mahoney relative to the candidacy of Mr. LaFollette, I feel it incumbent upon me to state the position of the Workers Party of America on this matter. In the coming negotiations between the National Committee of the National Farmer-Labor Party and other groups relative to combined action upon a Presidential candidate, the only basis upon which the Workers Party will accept LaFollette as a candidate is that he agree to run as a Farmer-Labor candidate, to accept the party's platform and its control over his electoral campaign and campaign funds."

### **Candidates Nominated.**

The convention proceeded to consider the nomination of President and Vice President. Alexander Howat of Kansas nominated Duncan McDonald in a speech outlining his services to the working class movement, as a member of the Illinois mine workers' union and an official of that organization. The nomination of McDonald was greeted with a demonstration which lasted five minutes or more while the delegates cheered for the Farmer-Labor Party and its working class candidate. Upon the vote being taken, the nomination was made unanimous.

Delegate Kennedy of Washington nominated William Bouck, president of the Western Progressive Farmers' organization, as a candidate for Vice President. Bouck was nominated unanimously, no oppos-

ing candidate being placed into nomination.

With the nominations completed, the Platform Committee report was again taken up. Chairman Manley of that committee again reported the platform as brought before the convention on the previous day,

only a slight change having been made in the declaration for Negro equality so as to make it of a general character against all discrimination. A number of farmer delegates took issue with the section of the platform dealing with unemployment and calling upon the government to take care of the unemployed during the period in which no work was obtainable. Max Bedacht took up this question and explained it from the standpoint of the industrial worker, pointing out that the reason the government was called upon to

maintain the unemployed was because this was the only way of bringing pressure to bear upon the government and the employing class so that they would provide work for the unemployed. He pointed out that the workers were loafing not because they wanted to loaf, but because there was no work to be done.

Delegate Starkey of the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly at this point tried to create a diversion by a statement in regard to Communist activities in the convention, but was ruled out of order by the chairman and walked out of the hall amidst the "boos" of the delegates.

After some further debated on the platform the question of adoption was put to vote and the motion carried without a dissenting voice.

One of the interesting manifestations during consideration of the platform was the fact that the greatest applause was given to those sections of the platform dealing with American imperialism, demanding recognition of Soviet Russia, freedom for the Philippines, withdrawal of American marines from all South and Central American territory, and refusal to spend a single dollar in support of Wall Street invest-



William Bouck  
Farmer of Sedro-Woolley, Washington

ments in foreign countries.

The state delegations, after the adoption of the platform, announced their selection for members of the National Committee, and the convention then adjourned.

### Meeting of the National Committee.

The National Committee met on the following day at the Hotel Ryan and took up the question of the election of the officers and the National Executive Committee. Those elected were: Chairman, Alexander Howat; Secretary, Clarence A. Hathaway; Members of the National Executive Committee, the above two, and William Mahoney, Alice Lorraine Daly, Scott Wilkins, Joseph Manley, and Alfred Knutson. The National Committee authorized the National Executive Committee to attend the Conference for Progressive Political Action at Cleveland and to conduct any negotiations under the clause of the Organization Committee report authorizing same.

### Victory Against Great Odds.

The fact that the June 17 Convention was able to maintain its unity and to end its work with the great mass of delegates united upon a common platform, organization plan, and candidates, is a great achievement for the Farmer-Labor movement of this country.

Probably no greater effort was made to destroy a convention than the attacks made against this gathering. The press of St. Paul and Minneapolis daily published broadsides against the convention. Every sort of misrepresentation and distortion was resorted to in order to frighten the delegates. The bogey of Communist control and Communism and Moscow direction was on the front pages day after day. Vicious lies as to statements by various delegates tending to disrupt the convention were in every story published. In spite of this the convention was able to come to a unanimous decision on candidates, organizational plan, and

platform. At the end it stood as a unit against all enemies of the Farmer-Labor movement.

This fact is the best evidence that the Farmer-Labor Party movement as it is manifesting itself today is not something ephemeral which is to be quickly destroyed. It springs out of the needs and experiences of the masses of exploited farmers and industrial workers. It expresses the protest of the advanced section of



Alex Howat

these masses against the existing social order. Behind it there is the determination to create a fighting organization which will challenge the continued rule of special privilege in this country.

The St. Paul Convention has laid the groundwork for the permanent organization of a Farmer-Labor Party on a mass scale. In the candidates nominated and the platform adopted there is the basis for a nationwide struggle against the capitalist order in this country.

To build upon this foundation, to bring into existence a Farmer-Labor Party representing the industrial workers and exploited farmers in every state, to win for this party the mass support of the workers and farmers — this is the new work before us.

When the history of the Farmer-Labor movement is written, the St. Paul Convention will stand as a historic landmark in its development. It will mark the permanent crystallization of the Farmer-Labor movement in a Farmer-Labor Party and the beginning of a period of growth and development which will not end until the Workers' and Farmers' Government is achieved!

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

*Drawings of Bouck and Howat by Robert Minor, published with the original article.  
Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.*