

CHAPTER X

A FARMER-LABOR PARTY

OUR proposal for a Farmer-Labor Party as the chief way of stopping the advance of fascism in the United States is the outstanding feature of our policy of the united front. Faced with growing attacks by the capitalists, the workers, the farmers, and the lower middle classes must bring together all their organizations for the joint defense of their most immediate interests. In spite of all differences that exist among them regarding ultimate questions concerning the present social order, we propose that they all enter a Farmer-Labor Party which will carry the fight for their most urgent needs over into the political field. Thus this party, based upon the trade unions, upon the mass organizations of the farmers, middle class groups and unemployed, and including the Communist and Socialist Parties, is the united front on a higher plane. It will carry the struggle of the masses into the elected institutions of government, and from these inner positions advance the fight against the capitalists.

The two traditional political parties of American capitalism, Republican and Democratic, are showing signs of disintegration. We have already discussed some of the symptoms: the Townsend, Epic and Utopian movements; the new "Progressive Party" of the LaFollettes in Wisconsin; the stirring in the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota; the movement around Father Coughlin and his Union for Social Justice; the victories of the Socialist Party candidates in Bridgeport, Conn.,

and Reading, Pa.; the fine showing of labor and united tickets in the 1935 state and municipal elections held all over the country. The temper and opinions of the masses supporting these movements represent a breakaway from the old capitalist parties, and to a lesser degree from the present capitalist system. These people are in the process of being radicalized. They are looking for a decisive way out of their present mess of troubles. They are becoming more willing to take the paths of struggle against the capitalist class and can thus be prepared through their own experiences for the socialist revolution.

Millions of people are cutting loose from their old moorings. Often they follow leaders and programs that are almost indistinguishable from that of the old parties—the LaFollettes, for instance. In many cases they are attracted by programs that are utopian in character and are not intended by their sponsors to ever be carried out. Some movements are therefore reactionary in their leadership which in some cases is representative of general drift towards fascism. Our problem is to help these millions to recognize their class enemy—the monopoly capitalists, and thus to understand their own class interests and to prepare them to go along the paths of class struggle.

We Communists would be delighted if we could bring these millions immediately behind our own program and our Party. But we are realists. We know that these masses have as yet not had that necessary experience which will bring them solidly behind our leadership. Yet it is vitally important to prevent these people from being drawn into the channels of fascism. To prevent this vast energy from being short-circuited by the capitalists, it is necessary to lead them to independent political action, to united struggles against the capitalists. This can best be achieved under present conditions by federating

the trade unions and all other mass organizations of the toilers into a wide Farmer-Labor Party representing a coalition of all the people prepared to resist the attacks of capitalism.

Such a party cannot arise spontaneously. It must be led and organized by a united front coalition of the most advanced sections of the toiling masses. It is not a question for quiet abstract discussion which will clear up every problem in advance. It is an urgent practical problem that must be solved quickly, otherwise reaction will triumph in the United States.

A possible program for such a party, having the broadest mass appeal and including a minimum of points, not difficult for large masses of people to understand, would contain something like the following planks:

1. Higher wages. The 6-hour day, 30-hour week, without reduction in weekly earnings.
2. The right to organize. Full recognition of collective bargaining through unions of the workers' choice, and the outlawing of company unions.
3. Adequate relief to unemployed workers and toiling farmers. Genuine unemployment and social insurance. Old-age pensions. Funds to be secured by taxation of high incomes and fortunes.
4. A program of public works that will be of lasting social benefit to the masses. Union wages on all public works. Public control by unions, unemployed organizations and farmers' organizations of the funds and direction of the public works projects.
5. The opening of all closed factories by the government to supply jobs to the unemployed at union wages.
6. Against sales taxes, high utility rates, and high monopoly prices. For the taxation of the rich and lightening the heavy burden of taxes upon the workers, farmers, middle classes and professionals.

7. Immediate full payment of the bonus to the veterans through taxation of high incomes and fortunes.
8. Relief to impoverished farmers, against evictions and foreclosures and for government loans without interest to poor and needy farmers. Cancellation of the debts of the toiling farmers. For a policy of satisfactory prices to the farmers and toiling population of the cities at the expense of the profits of the monopolies, banks and speculators. Land for the sharecroppers and small tenant farmers.
9. Full support for the program of demands of the American Youth Congress.
10. Full civic rights for Negroes, especially in the South. Abolition of the jim-crow system and all forms of discrimination. The death penalty for lynchers. Full support for the National Negro Congress.
11. For the preservation of all democratic liberties. Unrestricted civil and workers' rights. For the abolition of the power of the Supreme Court to invalidate social legislation. For the right of the masses to initiate legislation by referendum and to recall officials who betray the trust of the masses.
12. For the elimination and punishment of corruption in government.
13. Outlawing the use of professional strike-breakers, vigilantes, police, National Guard and Federal troops against the struggles of toilers for the betterment of their conditions.
14. For a genuine and consistent peace policy. Against imperialist exploitation of colonial peoples and imperialist war. Against armaments and militarism. Against the fascist war instigators everywhere. Collaboration with all forces fighting for peace.
15. For the protection of the interests and rights of toiling women. Against all reactionary and fascist attempts to dis-

qualify women from full participation in the economic and political life of the country.

Here are burning issues around which millions of people can be drawn into organized struggle and around which a big Farmer-Labor Party can be built. Such a Party will not come of itself. It must be fought for; it must be organized. That is the job that we Communists have proposed to all the honest and intelligent elements in the labor movement, and among the farmers and middle classes. It is a job which if done quickly will prevent reaction from making the entire country one huge concentration camp.

We are glad to see that progressive labor leaders, who a year ago fully supported Roosevelt and the New Deal, as a result of bitter experience come out for a Labor Party. This change among many workers and some of their leaders was put very well in the speech of Francis J. Gorman (the leader of the national textile strike in 1934), at the 55th Convention of the A. F. of L.:

"We have learned that the government leans on big business. We have learned that the Republican Party means destruction to the workers, and that the New Deal means a New Deal for big business and a raw deal for labor.

"The Labor Party must be for all these people, for everybody whose right to live under decent conditions, and to take a hand in the guiding of his own destinies, must be protected. But, let me repeat, if it is to be successful, the basis of the party must be the organized labor movement.

"There have been, in the past, and at the present time there are, third party movements, based on the discontent of the destitute farmers, which movements have as yet been unsuccessful in their attempts at expanding their bases. In addition, their programs have been nebulous, rambling allusions to 'security', to social reforms not clearly or concisely enunciated. The program of a

successful Labor Party must be definite, must be built on the immediate demands of the workers, with a definite eye toward an expanding, even more inclusive program. It cannot be successful on any other basis.

"But let us not talk of 'third parties'. This Labor Party must never be confused with a *third party*. The Labor Party is a *second party*. I think you will have by now agreed with me that there is slight differentiation between the two old political parties, that a confusion of the Labor Party movement with a third party movement will be a confusion of the fundamental aims of a Labor Party."

This conception of a Labor Party agrees in principle with our conception of a People's Front in the United States. It marked a turning point in the history of the labor movement, when an important labor leader voicing the sentiments of large sections of trade unionists and toilers in general came out in the name of his organization for a fighting Labor Party, for a decisive break with the two old parties. It is more important still that Gorman's resolution was supported by 5,000 votes out of a total 30,000 in the Convention, that it was supported by about one-third of the A. F. of L. even in 1935 when little effort had yet been made in its behalf. Our Party welcomes this development in the labor movement, and pledges itself to do its utmost to help build this kind of a workers' and farmers' party. This federation of workers, farmers, and urban middle classes into a united front party must be understood as a lasting coalition of these exploited classes for joint struggle to achieve their common interests over a long period of time.

We do not propose to limit the program of the Farmer-Labor Party to issues on which we have already aroused mass movements, but want to develop this program on a broader scale. We propose that this party listen to every voice that

expresses some burning desire of the masses, and find the best formulations for every mass demand.

Some people have accused us of proposing such a party because we want to "trick" the masses into revolution. But there is no trick about it; everything is open and above-board. We believe that the needs of the masses would be best served by such a party; that is why we are fighting for it. Because they are as yet not ready to accept our full program, we propose a program which they themselves are beginning to voice. This does not mean that we Communists are abandoning the idea of the revolution. We believe that such a Farmer-Labor movement would give a revolutionary education to the masses. The Communists in such a movement, by being in the forefront of every struggle, would influence it, would strengthen it, and at the same time strengthen our own party. For the Farmer-Labor Party would bring the masses face to face with the problem of state power, and therefore with all the problems of revolution. Such a party, while not having the program of the proletarian revolution and of socialism, would necessarily have to fight on the most important issues of the day. Hence, it would educate the masses and lead them toward the Communist program. For our aims are not mere speculations. They are derived from life itself, from the multitude of problems that harass and perplex the masses, the problems of bread and butter.

What are the prospects for such a united front party? The 1935 elections showed that the masses were growing more disillusioned with the two old parties, specifically with the New Deal, but they did not make any great break with their old allegiances. However, there was a second feature which opponents of the Farmer-Labor Party have overlooked. Whenever a strong effort was made to give direction to mass discontent, labor tickets registered serious opposition to the

Democrats and Republicans. This was seen especially in Detroit, Reading, Bridgeport, Toledo, and many smaller places. This means that where hard work is done to organize the masses against reaction and fascism, fruitful results are obtained.

Both capitalist parties realize the danger of the emergence of a Farmer-Labor Party and are doing all in their power to check the growth of this movement. And we must not delude ourselves into believing that many toilers will not fall victims to the demagoguery of the Liberty League and Hearst, if they have no alternative but the bankrupt New Deal. This was shown in the last election which revealed the dangerous tendency for discontented workers to express their disgust with the New Deal by returning to the Republican fold.

The Farmer-Labor Party will not be built unless we turn our full energies to the task. We have yet to convince the masses that their party must be the Farmer-Labor Party. We must answer all the arguments that will be used against it by the Hearsts and Liberty Leaguers on one side, and by the New Dealers, and reactionary leaders in the A. F. of L. and the Old Guard of the Socialist Party on the other. Unless we convince the masses and show them in terms of their own daily life, their own locality, and their own mode of work, just what the Farmer-Labor Party means to them, we will not be able to successfully build such a party.

A word on the role of Communists in a Farmer-Labor Party. Will the masses accept their participation in this united front party? There is growing evidence that the answer will be in the affirmative. At the A. F. of L. convention, the reactionary bloc led by Green-Woll-Hutcheson had to back down on a proposal that would have driven all Communists out of A. F. of L. unions. At the national convention of the American Federation of Teachers, Green and the reactionary ad-

ministration of the New York City Teachers Union were decisively defeated by a united front of all progressive forces. Socialists and progressives found that no matter how deep their prejudices, it was necessary and useful to fight *with*, and not against, the Communists.

Among all strata of the population the same process is taking place. They are slowly learning that the reactionaries raise the Red issue as the first step in their program to destroy all that is progressive in the country. They are becoming more receptive to Communists as their hatred for fascism grows. This was expressed by Milo Reno, one of the most important farm leaders, when he issued the following statement:

"I will say frankly that if I am compelled to make a choice between a fascist dictatorship, in which a few, who have gathered unto themselves the wealth created by others, supported by a military dictator, which will make all of those who serve, simply beasts of burden, or the Communist idea of tearing down the whole system and then rebuilding it, I would be inclined to the latter."

The idea is seeping into the minds of many people that only a coalition movement of all liberals, progressives, Socialists and Communists, can prevent the darkness of fascism from coming over our land. Liberals, educators, churchmen are joining in the cry for the united front. Here is what a prominent liberal, Dr. David Saposs, had to say last summer when he addressed the Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia:

"Nothing short of an enduring, far-sighted and courageous alliance of the liberal middle class, the Socialists and Communists, can keep the middle class and workers from abdicating to fascism, and the whole world from being precipitated into another war."

The building of this lasting alliance is the biggest task before the American toilers. It is the only bulwark against economic catastrophe, against political reaction and fascism, against the growing danger of another war.

Many people want to know what would happen if such a united front party becomes a majority against the forces of reaction. This is a question which, while not an immediate one, must be faced by us as a practical problem. For the masses ask us now whether such a Farmer-Labor Party would take over control of the government, and what such a united front government could do. We declare that such a government will not be able to introduce socialism. Such a government would be primarily a government of the People's Front struggle against fascism and economic chaos. Such a government could protect the democratic rights of the toilers. It could fight against the economic chaos of the capitalist system, and thus give the toilers the opportunity to learn from their own experiences that they must adopt a far more thorough-going program in order to realize socialism, which is the only and final solution of all their problems.

Communists will support such a united front government so long as it really uses its powers to protect and extend the economic and political rights of the masses. We are even prepared, under certain conditions, for practical participation in such a government, which can save the masses from going through the horrors of fascist barbarism.

But we will always declare that such a government will not be able to introduce socialism, which can only be done through a real revolutionary government, a Soviet government of workers and other toilers.

A united front government could only come out of the People's Front movement against capitalist reaction. It could come into existence only under the pre-condition of a serious

political crisis, when the ruling class is unable to cope with the struggle of the masses against reaction and fascism. It could only come when large masses of workers and their organizations are participating in the united front and are demanding decisive and uncompromising action against the reactionaries and the fascists. At that time a united front government would be not only possible, but its formation would be necessary for the protection of the interests of the toilers.

We must emphasize that this united front government would be a transitional form. It should not be confused with the Soviet government of the victorious proletarian revolution, composed of an alliance of Communists, Left Socialists, and other groups which had jointly participated in the overthrow of the capitalists. Such a united front government would be possible *before* the victory of the proletarian revolution; it would be a bulwark against reaction while the majority were preparing themselves for a final decision as between capitalism and socialism.

This united front government, which would come when the masses are ready to fight against fascism, but are not yet prepared to fight for *Soviet power*, would have nothing in common with the opportunist conceptions of the reformists about coalition government. It would not be the kind of unprincipled government bloc that the Social-Democratic Parties in Europe formed with sections of the bourgeoisie. This old coalition policy represented collaboration with the ruling class to save capitalism from the attacks of the toilers. Our perspective of a united front government is one of an instrument of struggle against capitalism, of the collaboration of all anti-fascist parties and groups, against reaction and fascism, and for the interests of the entire working population.