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**Letter to M. Hansen, Secretary,  
English Branch — Seattle, WPA,  
from James P. Cannon,  
Assistant Executive Secondary, WPA,  
July 22, 1924.**

A document in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 324, ll. 80-82.

July 22, 1924.

M. Hansen  
2117 Seventh Ave.  
Seattle, Wash.

Dear Comrade:

We have just received your letter of July 17 and have carefully noted all that you have to say in regard to the situation confronting the Party in the state of Washington, in the light of the recent decisions on Labor Party policy by the CEC.

Our Labor Party policy was based on the principles of the United Front laid down by the Fourth Congress of Communist International [Nov. 5-Dec. 5, 1922]. In order for us to take part in the Labor Party movement, instead of conducting election campaigns under our own name, a necessary condition must be the participation in the movement of large bodies of other workers who are willing to make a common fight with us on the basis of the class struggle. [For] the advantage of thus coming into contact with a mass movement in order to work there for the principles of Communism and to draw the masses of workers nearer to the Communist position and to the leadership of our Party, we could afford to sacrifice temporarily the tremendous advantage of operating in an election campaign under the name of our own Party, as is done in nearly every other country in the world.

The statement in *The Daily Worker* correctly set

forth the actual situation confronting us in the present campaign. Despite all of our efforts to create a United Front political movement under the banner of the Farmer-Labor Party on a national scale, we were not successful. The reasons for our failure were the treachery and cowardice of [John] Fitzpatrick and his group in Chicago [the Chicago Federation of Labor] in the first place. The betrayal of the Labor Party movement by the Socialist Party, the tremendous sweep of the LaFollette movement throughout the Farmer-Labor Party generally, so neutralized its class character as to make it impossible for us to hold any considerable sections of it in line for a class fight on a national scale, although we fought for this end with all our power to the very last.

After the Cleveland Convention we were confronted by the following facts:

1.) There was not even a voice raised in the Cleveland Convention of the CPPA [July 4-5, 1924] against LaFollette and for the Farmer-Labor Party in the present campaign. Even the Socialist Party, even Eugene V. Debs, surrendered unconditionally to LaFollette, the petty bourgeois politician, and cravenly gave up the fight for a Labor Party.

2.) A large section even of the elements which made up the St. Paul Convention [of the FFLP, June 17-19, 1924] were unable to stand up against the pressure of the LaFollette forces and capitulated to it. Even such Farmer-Laborites as William Mahoney of Minnesota, Alice Daly of South Dakota, † Kidwell of California, and many other outstanding figures in the

†- Alice Lorraine Daly and William Mahoney were the two non-Workers Party members of the seven member National Executive Committee of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party.

movement up till now, who could be mentioned, found it easier to betray the interests of the working class and the principle of the Labor Party than to fight against the permeation of the poisonous doctrine of LaFolletteism into the class movement.

3.) We discussed the situation for many days and considered it from all angles. We took up the state of affairs in every single state and discussed them in detail.

We put the question to ourselves this way: If we can see a substantial United Front mass movement on a national scale under the banner of the Farmer-Labor Party, we will go along with it and conduct the campaign as part of the United Front. If there is no United Front and no mass movement, if the Farmer-Labor Party represents in reality nothing but the Communists and a circle of close sympathizers of the Communists, then we are duty bound to raise our own standard and fight in our own name in order that we may not be hampered in making the most out of the campaign for the Communist principles, which, in the final analysis are the only things worth fighting for, and to the advancement of which all other considerations are subordinate.

The conclusion we finally arrived at, on the basis of the facts staring us in the face, was that the Farmer-Labor United Front in the present campaign does not exist, with the possible exception of two or three states such as Minnesota, Montana, and Washington. This judgment of the CEC was confirmed by a special Party conference of District Organizers, Federation Secretaries, Party editors, and a number of other leading comrades from various sections of the country.

To have concluded the campaign under the banner of the Farmer-Labor Party, in the face of such circumstances, would not have been to the best interests of our Party, which are one and the same thing with the interests of the working class. It would have meant that the whole burden of the campaign on a national scale would have fallen on the shoulders of our Party. We would have been obliged to do all the work, furnish practically all the speakers, pay all the expenses. With the exception of a circle of close sympathizers who will support the Communist candidates just as readily in most cases, there would have been no one to help us, no United Front.

On the other hand, to conduct such a campaign under the name of the Farmer-Labor Party would have obliged us to moderate the propaganda and tone down the whole campaign. We would not have been able to use the campaign meetings to promote our Party and its press. In a word, we would have been making all the sacrifices from the standpoint of our Party that a United Front movement entails without having a United Front in reality, without having a mass movement, for the sake of connecting ourselves with [that] which, in order to permeate it with Communism, we could make such sacrifices of immediate Party interests.

It should be said also that a considerable number even of the National Committee elected at St. Paul were preparing to desert the Farmer-Labor Party and go over to LaFollette. William Mahoney resigned and issued a statement to the press calling on [FFLP Presidential candidate] Duncan MacDonald to withdraw in favor of LaFollette. Alice Lorraine Daly was here in Chicago negotiating with the LaFollette campaign managers.

In the face of this situation, we arrived at the unanimous decision to enter the campaign under the banner of the Workers Party with Foster and Gitlow as the candidates, on a clearly defined revolutionary basis.

However, we consider that the principle of the United Front and the conditions under which we still support it, and our willingness to participate in it, hold good now as before. Wherever there is a United Front political movement embracing wider masses of the workers than we are able to draw around us for direct support of the Workers Party, we will take part in such a movement. In the state of Washington, for example, where we are of the opinion that the Farmer-Labor Party has some of the proportions of a mass movement, our policy will be to support the state ticket of the Farmer-Labor Party, provided it stands on a class basis and makes no alliances which would bring it under the leadership of the petty bourgeois politicians. The Farmer-Labor Party of Washington is in no way jeopardized by the action which we have taken on a national scale. The same holds true in a few other states where there is a substantial state Farmer-Labor Party which will go through the campaign with its own state candidates.

We can understand how the decision of the CEC may have taken some of the Labor Party leaders in the state of Washington by surprise because conditions were developing so fast that we were obliged to move quickly, and it was not possible for us to have lengthy and delayed consultations with people all over the country. However, there is absolutely no foundation for any opinion or charge that the Workers Party has betrayed the confidence of any sincere supporters of the Farmer-Labor movement who have been working in cooperation with us. We stand now as before ready to work together with them in a common fight wherever it is possible to make a substantial showing.

There is another aspect to this question which your letter does not deal with, which it is very necessary to speak about. The whole letter of the comrades from the English branch of Seattle seems to approach the question in all of its phases from the standpoint of the Farmer-Labor Party and from the standpoint of those Farmer-Labor leaders with whom we have been cooperating to a certain extent. This puts the whole question on a false basis. Communists have to approach all these problems from the standpoint of the Communist Party, which is identical with the immediate and ultimate interests of the working class and which is the only Party that stands for these interests. Any activities that we engage in that do not result in strengthening and building and increasing the influence of the Communist Party do not serve the interests of the working class because they do not help to develop the indispensable instrument, not merely for the final revolutionary victory, but for their immediate struggles which lead towards it; that is, an independent revolutionary Party which stands up at all times for the interests of the working class as a whole and which leads the way at every stage of the fight.

Do not be so sensitive, comrades, about doing “grave injustice” to the other elements in the labor movement, and do not be so willing to come to the conclusion that the subordination of your own Party is always the correct thing to do. The Communist International never tires of dinning into our ears that

our first reaction to all political maneuvers must be: How does it increase the influence of the Communist Party over the laboring masses? Zinoviev told us once, at a session of the Enlarged Executive Committee: “Do not forget that we are not merely a workers’ party. We have to be a shrewd workers’ party, because we are dealing with all kinds of enemies of the labor movement, with all kinds of agents of the bourgeoisie, and with muddleheaded people whose muddleheadedness will lead the workers into the ditch. See to it that the Communist Party knows how to take advantage of every situation to strengthen the Communist influence over the masses. Only when you are doing this can you say that you are leading towards the final revolutionary struggle.”

With such well-informed leaders of the Farmer-Labor movement as John Kennedy and William Bouck, there is no reason why you cannot talk quite frankly. Tell them what we have done and why we have done it. But don’t forget in these conversations that they are talking from the standpoint of the Farmer-Labor Party and you are talking from the standpoint of the Communist Party, which is an entirely different thing. You should not take a defensive or apologetic attitude. The comrades of the Seattle branch should say, “This is the policy of our Party. It has been decided by our leading committee and we are going to fight for it with all our militancy.”

If you have any difference of opinion about the wisdom of a given policy, it is quite proper to raise the question in the Party ranks if a situation is such that discussion does not hamper the action of the Party, but before the whole outside world, including even our “best friends,” their attitude should always be, “The Policy of the Communist Party is the policy that serves best the interests of the working class.”

Fraternally yours,

[James P. Cannon]

Assistant Executive Secretary.

C:D

***Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.***

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