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# Report from William Z. Foster in Chicago to A. Lozovsky in Moscow, November 7, 1924.

A document in the Comintern Archive, RGASPI f. 515, op. 1, d. 406, ll. 16-21.

*Confidential.*  
November 7, 1924.

Dear Comrade Lozovsky,

Having returned now from my long trip campaigning in the election, it was 18,000 [miles] in length, I am now ready to jump into the industrial work again.† I must begin by making you a report upon the general situation. As for the election, there is no need for me to say much about that. The Republican Party, the party of the big capital, has won a complete victory. The capitalists are in great glee at the present time. The LaFollette movement has suffered a big defeat, in spite of the fact that it probably polled 5 million or more votes. The leaders of this movement set such a big goal for themselves, many of them even claiming LaFollette would be elected, that now their followers are tremendously disappointed. **Pessimism runs all through the labor movement as the result of the election.** Gompers has already practically cut himself loose from LaFollette, by saying that the only reason he endorsed LaFollette was as a protest against the two old parties which refused to put in their platforms a single plank demanded by labor. The outcome of the election will be a great weakening of the Third Party movement. If such a party is actually formed, it will be comparatively small and will start out under the handicap of the election defeat. As for myself, I am rather in doubt that any such party will be formed.

The majority of the Central Executive Committee of the Workers Party was compelled, as you know,

to withdraw our support from the candidates of the national Farmer-Labor Party, MacDonald and Bouck, and to put up candidates of our own in the elections. This action was a practical recognition of the fact that the Farmer-Labor Party movement, as such, was dead, it having been swallowed up by the LaFollette petty bourgeois movement. **Now we are being driven to the conclusion that we also have to give up the slogan "For a Farmer-Labor Party." The reason for this is that it is a dead slogan. For us to continue to use it as our central slogan would simply be to sabotage the Workers Party.** The masses will not respond to it any more. Insofar as the conservative workers develop mass political action in the United States, it will be in combination with the petty bourgeois elements in the LaFollette movement. The only elements that will not go along with this petty bourgeois movement are revolutionary in character and can be either absorbed directly into the Workers Party, or organized by it into various united front forms. Our Party is divided on this question, the Ruthenberg minority still clinging to the idea of propagating the Farmer-Labor Party slogan, in face of the fact that there is no mass movement for it. I am enclosing herewith a copy of the statement of the Central Executive Committee on this subject. This will be the leading question of controversy in our Party convention. We have applied to the Comintern for permission to hold such a convention in January [1925].‡

The vote of our Party in the elections will be small. Various factors go to make this up. In the first place great numbers of the foreign workers, the ones

†- William Z. Foster was the first Presidential candidate of the American Communist movement, running in the November 1924 campaign with Benjamin Gitlow as his running mate. Foster garnered 33,076 votes in 14 states in which the Workers Party of America appeared on the ballot.

‡- The 4th National Convention of the Workers Party of America was actually not held until August 21-30, 1925.

upon whom we have to depend for our votes, are not citizens and cannot vote. Besides, the LaFollette movement attracted the most progressive and radical elements in the working class, except the Communists, which stripped us almost entirely of our sympathizers. The great mass of conservative workers, of course, supported Coolidge and Davis. In addition, however, this is very important, the representatives of the old parties, who controlled the election machinery all over the country, will not count the votes of our party. We already have many proofs that our vote is being ignored by the counters. This is quite a customary thing in America. There is every reason to believe that LaFollette himself was robbed of about 1 million votes in this manner. I doubt if we will be credited with more than 20,000 or 25,000 votes in the final count. We estimate, however, that we polled at least 100,000 votes.

Now as for the situation with our industrial work. In this respect we are **in a crisis**. Many factors contribute to greatly restrict the extent and influence of our work in this respect. **We are now very much isolated in the trade unions.** This was brought about largely by the development of the big offensive of the reactionary bureaucrats in most of the important unions. They have declared war against us all along the line. The consequence is that most of the workers, who sympathized with us in regard to amalgamation but who nevertheless were very conservative in their political conceptions, were easily frightened away from us by the reactionaries using their "red scare." This tendency toward **isolation was greatly increased by the Farmer-Labor split in Chicago**, which separated large numbers of sympathizers from the League. But the worst blow of all came with the development of the LaFollette movement. This cut off many of the most valuable sympathizing elements we had in the unions. As stated above, the LaFollette movement made an especial appeal to the more advanced and progressive elements in the unions, and when we took a stand against the movement they, naturally misun-

derstanding our motives, turned against us and denounced us. The consequence is that we are very much isolated at the present time. How long this isolation will last is problematical. We shall have to make the best of the situation. There is no other element in the labor movement advocating even the mildest forms of progress in the unions, so the workers, in spite of their remaining distrust of all revolutionists, must eventually turn to us for leadership as against their reactionary bureaucrats.

As I have stated to you in previous letters, only a very small percentage of our Party is made up of active trade unionists. In this respect we are probably worse off than any other party in the Comintern. Our Party is primarily a Party of foreign born workers, most of these, except those in the needle trades, being altogether unable to get effective expression in their unions. Now that the isolation of our Party has taken place, which of course reflects itself in the Trade Union Educational League, the trade union weakness of our Party membership stands out in bold relief. The work of the League has suffered very much in all the localities. One of the effects of this was a rapid fall in the circulation of *The Labor Herald*. It got down to little more than 5,000. So there was nothing else to do except to amalgamate the paper along with *The Liberator* and the Soviet Pictorial [*Soviet Russia Pictorial*] into *The Workers Monthly*.†

We believe that the merging of the papers will bring the League much closer to the Party membership than heretofore. The securing of the backing of our own members still remains one of the greatest problems of the League. Our foreign born workers have very little understanding about working in the trade unions. By driving the proposition home to them directly in the official party organ, *The Workers Monthly*, will be able to get better results from them. So long as *The Labor Herald* was an independent organ about the only ones who read it were our most active trade union elements and non-Party sympathizers. Now the

†- *The Labor Herald* was the monthly magazine of the Trade Union Educational League; *The Liberator* began as the successor to the legendary New York artistic and political magazine *The Masses* (banned from the mails by the Wilson regime), evolving by 1922 into the main theoretical organ of the Workers Party. *Soviet Russia Pictorial* was the monthly magazine of the Friends of Soviet Russia organization, being known prior to 1923 simply as *Soviet Russia*. In November of 1924 the three publications were consolidated into a single magazine called *The Workers Monthly*, which retained the volume and issue numbers of *The Labor Herald* but most closely resembled the style and content of *The Liberator*. This magazine continued until 1927, which it was dramatically changed in style and format and retitled *The Communist*. This magazine continued as the theoretical organ of the American Communist movement until it was in turn retitled *Political Affairs* in 1945. This magazine has continued its uninterrupted run into the early 21s Century.

whole Party membership will become much better acquainted with our industrial program by finding it constantly under their noses. It may be that we will have to issue a Bulletin for the League in the future. That question we can take up later. For the time being, however, I think the existing arrangement is the best that can be worked out. We must readjust our movement to the sharp isolation which it now suffers.

At the present time, the League is carrying on several campaigns of importance. One of these is in the election in the Miners' Union. This election is held



*Bill Foster in June 1924.*

by referendum. We have a full ticket in the field for national and local offices. Some of our comrades may be elected to minor offices. But so far as the national election is concerned, we will not cut much of a figure in that. Lewis and his gang of crooks will throw out our vote and reduce our total to as low as they think is necessary. This is an old practice in the Miners' Union. It is practically impossible to get the administration in power to count the votes of the opposition. Time and again in the past, administrations of the Union have been defeated in elections, but they have always robbed their opponents of the elections by padding their own vote and by throwing out the votes of the others.

We also have a full ticket in the election now going on in the Carpenters' Union. This is a very reactionary organization and our vote will not be large,

partly because the union is so reactionary and partly because the reactionary bureaucrats will disregard our vote. The election struggle in the Carpenters' Union has provoked the bureaucrats to expel numbers of our comrades in various cities.

In the Machinists' Union a referendum is now being taken upon the proceedings of the recent convention. We are carrying on a campaign to defeat the propositions of the Johnston administration. It is doubtful, however, if we will succeed. In the Machinists' Union, as in all the others, the common practice is for the group in power to entirely falsify referendum votes of the members to suit their own interests.

In the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers, which is a small but strategically situated organization of steel workers, our slate of candidates is having better success. According to the latest returns, we are actually defeating Tighe and the others of the old machine in many local unions. We will know the returns from this election shortly. Of course in all these elections we are doing our best to crystallize definite Left Wing movements and to bring our program forcefully to the attention of the rank and file.

In the IWW the situation is a peculiar one. You have been informed as to the split which has taken place in the organization. This split has become more serious, one group now calling definitely for the formation of a new organization. The recent convention showed the organization to be in a state of paralysis and intellectual bankruptcy. There is no leadership in it. This is partly due to the fact that the IWW permits its officials to stay in office only for one year at a time. Consequently the development of real leadership is virtually impossible. We played an active part in the recent convention and greatly extended our influence throughout the organization. The League work was conducted directly by Comrade Harrison George, Secretary of the Red International Affiliation Committee. Today he informed me that he would send you promptly full reports of the IWW convention and our policy and statements in connection with the same.

From indications that come to me it would seem that the impression is being created in Moscow that there is a big unemployment situation in the United States and that we are not properly exploiting it. This is not true. At the present time unemployment is slowly

on the decrease throughout the country. This is partially due to the revival taking place in agriculture, owing to higher prices for agricultural products. The prospects are that the tendency will continue for some time to come. The capitalists are enormously enthusiastic over the great victory by Coolidge. The stock market is the scene of excited speculation. **There is a prospect that industry may undergo something of a boom. The unemployment issue, while one that can be utilized effectively in a propagandist way, is not of such a character that we can successfully set up organizations of the unemployed.**

Comrade [Jack] Johnstone will cover the AF of L Convention for us in El Paso, Texas. He may also go to Mexico City to participate in the convention of the Pan-American Federation of Labor. I should have liked very much to go myself, but it was impossible., I have been out of the office too much this year as it is. First, there was three months for my trip to Russia, and then three months for the political campaign. I must concentrate upon the industrial situation again and try to stiffen up our organization all along the line.

We have not yet been able to hold a meeting of the Red International Committee., We did plan to have one 3 weeks ago, shortly after the return of Comrade Kucher from Russia. But owing to the meeting being called at an inopportune time, the train I was on was a little late and I missed the meeting. Nothing was done by those who were assembled. Consequently we cannot have another meeting until about the 1st of December [1925], when I shall be in New York again.

Trusting that you are fully recovered from your accident and in good health again, I remain,

Fraternally yours,

W.Z. Foster.

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