
The Farmer-Labor Party

by Upton Sinclair

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Three or four days ago it looked as if there were going to be a combination of all the various liberal and labor parties, with Senator LaFollette as candidate, and so I prepared a brief article, setting forth the high opinion I had of Senator LaFollette, and how sorry I was not to be able to support him for President. The next morning I opened my paper and read that the various parties had swallowed 5/6ths of the Committee of Forty-Eight and the remaining 1/6th of the committee had held a “rump” convention and had adopted resolutions setting forth how disappointed it was. The Farmer-Labor Party has nominated a man of whom I have never heard before [Parley Parker Christensen], but he comes from the West and is 6’4” high and weighs 287 pounds, and every pound was found useful in handling a stormy convention.

The explanation of the split is as follows: The Committee of Forty-Eight was organized by a group of liberals who are tinged with Single Tax thought. The Single Tax is a peculiarly American product; the natural clinging to individualist methods by a country which was settled by pioneers, men who moved on into the wilderness, and over the mountains and the prairies, in order to be able to live their own life in their own way. The program of the Committee of Forty-Eight was not an out-and-out Single Tax program, but it had the idea that if only we could do away with monopoly in natural resources (another phrase for what the Single-Taxers call land), industry would be set free and business enterprise could continue

to develop under free competition, as in the old pioneer days.

I have been arguing with Single-Taxers for some 15 years, pointing out to them that if we could have started on that basis in the beginning, if we had never let our natural resources be monopolized, we might possibly have never had any trusts; but we didn’t follow that plan, and now we have got the trusts, and you cannot destroy these great machines of production and distribution just by taxing away their land and natural resources. Labor sees these machines of production, which to labor present themselves as machines of oppression, and it seems to labor much simpler to take them over and socialize them than to undermine them and break them down and build new ones. That is the difference between Socialism and the Single Tax, and that is the reason why the Farmer-Labor Party delegates in Chicago were able to steal away 5/6ths of the Committee of Forty-Eight from the original founders of that well-meaning institution.

Labor, you see, has been under the harrow, and as Kipling says, “the toad beneath the harrow knows exactly where each plow point goes.” The Labor men came to Chicago determined to take over, not merely the railroads, but the mines and other basic industries. They came determined to do it by class action, whereas the Committee of Forty-Eight were piously determined that the job must be done by the whole people. The founders and leaders of the committee, Amos Pinchot, J.A.H. Hopkins, and the rest, declared that their

convention must not be stampeded; nevertheless, the convention voted to amalgamate with the Labor convention, and when the radical platform had been forced through, only 1/6th of the Committee of Forty-Eight could be persuaded to withdraw. So one more utopian dream came to smash on the realities of the class struggle!

The Farmer-Labor platform makes quite wonderful reading. I haven't been able to get it all, but the extracts published here in California are quite as radical as the Socialist platform. The only difference is that it doesn't call itself "Socialism"; and what I want to know is does the Socialist Party have to stand aloof from the labor movement simply because of a dispute over a name? Apparently it is too late to get the two groups together for this election, so we who are going to support Debs can do no more than resolve to do it as tactfully and persuasively as we can. If we must oppose the candidate of the Farmer-Labor Party, let us at least do it without bitterness and narrowness, without suspecting the motives of those who have not traveled quite so far along the path as we have.

Many years ago I came somewhere upon the saying that "the business of people with ideas is to have them stolen," and this saying has always stuck in my mind. I find myself without the slightest bit of jealousy because the Farmer-Labor Party has stolen so many of the ideas which I have been advocating for the last 20 years! I was even able to smile with pleasure when I read in an Associated

Press dispatch the other day that the chairman of the Committee of Forty-Eight Convention had made the remark that "the two old parties are two wings of the same bird of prey." I don't remember exactly when I first said that, but I think it was in the campaign of 1904. I know that Gene Debs has been saying it up and down the country for a dozen years. But I am just as glad to have Allan McCurdy put it on the Associated Press wires and have it read by all America. Go to it, Comrade McCurdy — or shall I say Farmer-Laborer McCurdy?

Last Sunday [July 25, 1920] there was held in Los Angeles a convention of the Socialist Party and of some 20 groups, including the Committee of Forty-Eight, the Plumb Plan League, and the World War Veterans. By this convention I was nominated as candidate for Congress in the 10th District of California. This was possible in part because of the policy I have always pursued, of keeping my guns trained on the enemy. I do not pretend to be able to say just how far the Socialist Party can cooperate with the Farmer-Labor Party, but I do say that every Socialist ought to be sure that if the two groups are kept apart, it is because of fundamental irreconcilability, and not because of bad manners and intolerance on the part of Socialists. I submit this suggestion in all humility, for the consideration of those who are to guide our party's destinies in these years of storm and peril.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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