

Wm. Z. Foster's Speech in Favor of the Formation of a Federated Labor Party

The most dramatic moment during the convention was when William Z. Foster took the floor after John Fitzpatrick spoke against the resolution to form a Federated Farmer-Labor Party and singled out the Workers Party for attack.

Foster's appearance on the platform was the signal for a deafening burst of applause, in contrast to the comparative silence that reigned during Fitzpatrick's tirade.

Brother Chairman and Fellow Delegates:—

There are just a few remarks that I would like to make.

I heard Brother Willis say that if this Organization Committee report was adopted, that in some manner or other the Farmer-Labor Party would commit itself in an irrevocable way. And I want to explain that idea right away.

If I understand anything about procedure, particularly trade union procedure, the present situation is this: We have assembled to devise the ways and means to bring about political unity of the workers. If we adopt this Committee Report, we go as far as we can in that direction. And then we take that Report back to our respective organizations, and if they ratify it we are a part of this Party.

Now, that is plain and simple. And if the Farmer-Labor Party has a Convention in the future, whenever that is called they will do the same as all the rest of us are going to do—lay before our organizations the result of this Conference, for ratification or rejection. So nobody's hands are being tied, here. And the Report can be adopted with a full and free will, by every delegate here, as far as his powers are concerned.

I listened to Brother Fitzpatrick. And Fitz and I have gone through some good battles together. We have stood shoulder to shoulder and fought one of the most villainous aggregations of capital on the face of the earth—the Packers' Trust, with headquarters here in Chicago. And we have fought the great Steel Trust together—and I understand what kind of a man he is. He has the courage of his convictions, and he expressed

them here on this platform. And I have never had to disagree with him until right here. But I must now disagree with him, and say that the duty of this Convention is to go right ahead and adopt the Organization Committee Report.

The creation of the Labor Party in America is a process different from that of any other country in the world. In England and various other countries we find the officials of the labor movement were quite generally in favor of working class political action. But that is not the case in this country. In this country the higher officials of the unions are almost unanimous against it. And the principle obstruction to the establishment of working class political unity in America is none other than the head of our labor movement—Samuel Gompers!

Now, in Chicago here, in the formation of the Farmer-Labor Party, a few years ago, Brother Fitzpatrick and those others who took part, split definitely with Gompers. They said, "We are through with that policy!" And I, for one, applauded them in that decision.

The Farmer-Labor Party drifted along, with more or less indifferent success for a while, until a new development took place—the movement of Bill Johnston, President of the International Association of Machinists—nearly all of us put faith in that movement. I confess that I didn't have as much faith in it as some—because I happened to know Bill Johnston pretty well. However, the labor movement quite generally said, "Here it is! The big International Union—the Machinists, the Miners, the Printers and state Federations, without number—every form and kind of organization lining up behind Bill Johnston's plan. And he held a conference in the city of Chicago—where they did not do anything except call another in Cleveland. And what happened there? Once again, nothing was done. And the hopes of the workers' organizations which were bound up with that conference were deliberately betrayed by the leaders, who had been instructed to form a

Labor Party in the United States. And there was no man in America who said more boldly and bravely than Fitzpatrick did, that the workers' hopes were betrayed. And the Farmer-Labor Party split with the Cleveland conference, which Fitzpatrick denounced as a scab organization and dual movement—and the Gompers policy continued as it was. It had broken with the entire official family of the American Federation of Labor, and knew that henceforth, if it was going to be a labor movement, the only way was to get out and disregard these officials and make an appeal to the rank and file to get into a political organization. And the Farmer-Labor Party did that. It issued a call inviting the rank and file to send delegates here. And here is the result of that call. And the sentiment of this gathering is that the Federated Farmer-Labor Party be formed. And I say that the logic of the Farmer-Labor Party, ever since it was born, indicates that it should go along with this movement and appeal to the rank and file of the labor organizations of America, to enlist themselves in this campaign. The only chance that the Farmer-Labor Party has to be a political factor is to go to the rank and file—as the big labor leaders are 100 per cent against such action at this time. And if the Farmer-Labor Party is not willing to do that, it should not have called this convention here.

That is my honest opinion. And I hope the leaders here will decide to go along with this great movement—and I don't hesitate to say that if they submit the question to their own rank and file, they will decide to go along with this movement.

In conclusion I will say that the time has come when there must be a militant struggle put up in all those unions that are for a Federated Farmer-Labor Party. That struggle has not been carried on effectively, up to this time. And if there is a Federated Farmer-Labor Party formed in the convention, that party will carry on such a struggle for a Labor Party in America that we shall win the great rank and file to that idea.