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# The Farmer-Labor Party Convention: Chicago — July 11-14, 1920.

by Robert M. Buck

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The 2nd National Convention of the Labor Party of the United States convened in Street Car Men's Hall, Chicago, July 11 [1920], for the purpose of adopting a platform and nominating candidates for President and Vice President of the United States.

The general routine of the convention each day is herewith recorded:

## *Sunday's Session [July 11, 1920].*

The convention was called to order at 11:15 am by Max Hayes, temporary chairman. Mr. Hayes rapped to order with a hammer, while someone was looking for a gavel. "This tool," said Mr. Hayes, "is emblematical of what we are going to do to the old parties this year." He called attention to the delegates of the treachery of the newspapers owned by big business and related how they had printed misinformation concerning the last convention, when the withdrawal of 2 members was exaggerated into a split-up of the party. Mr. Hayes said he believed that there was but slight differences of opinion between the various groups in Chicago bent upon establishing parties to battle the corrupt Democrat and Republican machines and hoped that through various committees a mutual plan of agreement could be worked out with the Committee of 48 and other groups.

Mr. Hayes introduced John Fitzpatrick, President of the Chicago Federation of Labor, who delivered the opening welcome to delegates, characterized as the keynote speech.

(Mr. Fitzpatrick's remarks are published elsewhere in this paper.)

## **Forty-Eighters Offer Parley.**

A resolution from the Committee of Forty-Eight which was read by C.F. France of Washington, asked the Labor Party convention provide for a subcommittee selected from the platform committee to confer with a similar committee of the Committee of Forty-Eight, that these two committees meet with a firm determination to attain a platform of fundamentals upon which both conventions could unite, a method for concerted political action, and common candidates.

Considerable discussion was aroused over the Committee on Conferences which had been appointed by the National Executive Committee to meet with committees of other groups, including the Single-Taxers and the Forty-Eighters. The committee, which consisted of John Fitzpatrick, Charles Kutz of Pennsylvania, William Kohn of the New York Labor Party, Mrs. H. Evans of Indiana, Mrs. Alice Snell Moyer of Utah, and M. Toscan Bennett of Connecticut was under fire by several delegates who wished to have a committee elected from the floor. A substitute motion was finally adopted to add 6 to the present committee, but when 16 names were presented to the convention, the delegates decided to elect the entire 16 by acclamation. They are as follows:

William Mitch — Indiana; Louis Schock — Pa.; Nicholas Klein — Ohio; Julius Deutelbaum — Detroit, Mich.; Francis J. Dillon — Indiana; Max Sellen — Ohio; Bert L. Stout — Iowa; J.W. Selsar — Missouri; Mary Gawthrop — New York; C.H. Johnson — Missouri; James Duncan — Seattle, Wash.; Alex Howatt — Kansas; H. Whittie — Iowa; Stalla Gramer

— Washington; Thomas A. Jones — New York; Harry Wineberger — New York.

A resolution offered by Robert M. Buck that the Committee on Conferences be authorized to continue its deliberations with other groups and to consider changing the name of the party to the Farmer-Labor Party of the United States and admitting the representatives of farmers' groups to function in the convention was referred to the Resolutions Committee. The significance of this resolution was felt in view of the fact that the South Dakota delegation headed by W.C. Remfer had decided not to go into the Committee of Forty-Eight and had expressed a decision that if the Labor Party changed its name to Farmer-Labor Party it would definitely affiliate its Non-Partisan League group with the Labor Party.

The rules used by the convention in November [1919] were readopted without the appointment of a Rules Committee and a partial list of credentials was read by Mrs. Moyer, chairman of the Credentials Committee.

Robert M. Buck was elected permanent chairman of the Resolutions Committee.

### **Walker Elected Chairman.**

Election of the permanent chairman of the convention took place by standing vote. John H. Walker, president of the Illinois Federation of Labor; James Duncan, former candidate for Mayor of Seattle; and Francis J. Dillon of the Indiana Labor Party were nominated. Two votes were taken, the second eliminating Dillon. John H. Walker was finally elected by a vote of 237 to 158. James Duncan was unanimously elected vice chairman. In his speech of acceptance Mr. Duncan answered the challenges of several delegates who questioned whether the nominees were regular dues paying members of the Labor Party by stating that he was a member of the working class of the world. The Central Labor Council of Seattle, of which Mr. Duncan is President, has definitely gone on record in favor of the Labor Party. He was sent as delegate from that body.

"If Abe Lincoln were here today," said Mr. Duncan, "he would be in jail. A good American will take all the chances that Abe Lincoln would if he were here. Let all the good people go to jail, not just a few of

them."

### **Hayes Given Vote of Thanks.**

A vote of thanks was extended to Max Hayes by the convention for his work in behalf of the Labor Party.

Before the convention adjourned for the day it was addressed by Tarknath Das on the political, economic, and educational status of India under the imperialistic policy of Great Britain.

The deliberations of the Conference Committee of the Labor Party and the Committee of the Forty-Eight Sunday evening resulted in the recommendations that the following resolutions be presented to the two conventions on Monday [July 12, 1920]:

1. That the conference should recommend to the two conventions an amalgamation.
2. That the Political Procedure Committee of the Committee of Forty-Eight and the Constitution Committee of the Labor Party appoint two subcommittees of 5 members each to confer as to the machinery of amalgamation.
3. That the Platform Committees of each group appoint a subcommittee of 5 to confer as to a common platform.

### ***Monday's Session [July 12, 1920].***

"Free speech or a free fight is the contest before the American people today," according to Lester Barlow, national organizer of the World War Veterans, who addressed the Labor Party delegates. He stated that American public school education had been prostituted by British imperial policy and cited instances from Hart's school histories used in grade schools all over the country to show that the books had been written to glorify England and impair the reputation of America. "If freedom was worth fighting for in 1776 it is worth fighting for in 1920," he said. "We are not talking revolution, we are talking of maintaining the government. The World War Veterans will campaign for the Labor Party and will guarantee that a million ex-servicemen will know by November what democracy means."

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The second day of the Labor Party convention

was marked by speeches from fraternal delegates, Frank P. Walsh delivering the principal address of the afternoon. It was a day of suspense for the delegates who awaited with keen interest the report of the Conference Committee of the Labor Party and the Committee of Forty-Eight.

Frank J. Esper, Secretary of the national Labor Party, presented his report, which covered the activities of the central office in Chicago since last November [1919]. According to Mr. Esper, 30,000 local unions and central bodies in the United States have been reached by Labor Party literature. Three states — Ohio, New York, and Illinois — have already chosen candidates for state offices on the Labor Party ticket. John H. Walker is candidate for Governor of Illinois, E.L. Hitchens, of Cincinnati, is candidate for Governor of Ohio. The office in New York has been left open on account of a coalition candidate, Rose Schneiderman, President of the Woman's Trade Union League of New York and an appointee of President Wilson to appear before the Peace Conference at Paris to represent the working women of America, has been chosen to run against Senator Wadsworth for the United States Senate.

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P.A. Moeller of North Dakota spoke on the Non-Partisan League and the relation of labor to the farmers. He was followed by Carl Thompson, former National Secretary of the Public Ownership League, who described the political situation in Minnesota and North Dakota.

The Rev. Bagnall, representing the [National] Association for the Advancement of Colored People spoke in behalf of the 12 million colored citizens in the United States. Miss Maude McCreery, formerly of the *Milwaukee Leader*, described the work of the Federated Press. Mrs. [Winnie] Branstetter of the Prison Comfort club told of the work being done for the industrial, religious, and political prisoners and was authorized to take up a collection which amounted to over \$150. Rafeale Mallen of the Cooperative Wholesale spoke on the need for the development of the cooperative movement throughout the United States and the world.

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Mrs. Katherine McCullough of the national League of Women Voters presented the program of the women in a manner that captured the audience. She asked that the convention embody in its platform the things that the women were asking, including adequate appropriation for the Children's Bureau, prohibition of child labor, federal aid for maternity and infant care, federal aid for education, a federal appropriation to eliminate social diseases, federal regulation of marketing and food to prevent excess profits, and the citizenship of married women on an equal basis with men.

H. Austin Simmons, Secretary of the Freedom Foundation, spoke on amnesty for political prisoners.

The question of amalgamation with the Committee of Forty-Eight was presented to the convention Monday night by M. Toscan Bennett, chairman of the Conference Committee which had been appointed to confer with a similar committee from the Forty-Eighters.

He explained that the proposal of the Labor Party committee that the two groups hold a joint convention and decide on the matter of name and platform was turned down by the Forty-Eighters. He said that the farmers in caucus that day had decided in favor of the Labor-Farmer Party. The Forty-Eighters asked that the Labor Party appoint subcommittees from their platform and political procedure committees to confer with similar committees from the Committee of Forty-Eight. This last proposal was submitted to the Labor Party convention. Mr. Bennett stated that the committee with which the Labor Party committees were supposed to confer were the same men they had been trying to negotiate with for 2 days. "These men," said Mr. Bennett, "are responsible for the present situation." He recommended, however, that although the Committee of Forty-Eight had sorely tried the patience of the labor party committee this last step be taken in order that no stone should be left unturned.

Max Hayes stated that the Labor Party committee had already made numerous concessions, regarding the changing of the name of the party and regarding the choice of candidate. He recommended that the request of the Forty-Eighters be acceded to but that the report of the committee should be ready by

10:00 am the next day, the Labor Party to continue its own deliberations regarding its platform and name if negotiations were not completed by that time.

Considerable discussion was aroused. Many delegates wished that no quarter be taken with the Forty-Eighters, accusing them of being intellectuals who wished to run the Labor Party.

Others wished that the last chance be given to the Forty-Eighters to come to an agreement with the Labor Party, stating that the rank and file of both conventions were in accord and that if the leaders of the Forty-Eighters would not amalgamate the real liberals of the Committee of Forty-Eight would bolt their own convention and come into the Labor Party.

Dudley Field Malone, a member of the Labor Party and a delegate to the Committee of Forty-Eight, in an impassioned address asked that the Labor Party consider the motion made by Max Hayes to give the Forty-Eighters a last chance. He said that this was the first time a political group had come before the American people with an economic program. The candidate, he said, was not so important as the program of principles.

The motion of Max Hayes was adopted almost unanimously and the convention adjourned until the following morning.

### *Tuesday's Session [July 13, 1920].*

Resolutions were adopted regarding the standard of wages of post office employees, recognizing Eugene V. Debs and Jim Larkin as martyrs to the cause of democracy and supporting the effort for their early release, and for giving the vote to migratory workers.

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Tuesday afternoon the convention reconvened with the added strength of the Committee of Forty-Eight delegation, which joined the Laborites *en masse*. The action taken by the Forty-Eighters in the morning was a virtual kicking over the traces by the rank and file of the delegates, who broke the leash of their conservative leaders and voted to submit the various points in dispute to the amalgamated convention as a committee of the whole.

The Labor Party greeted the Committee of Forty-Eight with an enthusiastic chorus of "Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here," accompanied by a band and it was some time before the convention could settle down to business. J.A.H. Hopkins, chairman of the National Executive Committee of the Committee of Forty-Eight, was elected joint chairman to act with John H. Walker. Mary Tudor Garland of Massachusetts was elected joint vice chairman. Parley P. Christensen, chairman of the Committee of Forty-Eight convention, presided while the nominations were being made and pulled a laugh out of the delegates when he turned over the gavel to Mr. Hopkins and a hammer to Mr. Walker.

### **Hopkins Pledges Support.**

The officers of the Committee of Forty-Eight were asked to speak to the convention by way of introducing themselves to the members of the Labor Party. Mr. Hopkins said:

The Labor Party and the Committee of Forty-Eight came together as naturally as two streams running down the side of a mountain towards the same place and coming to be a river. I am with you from the top of my head to the soles of my feet.

Allen McCurdy, Secretary of the National Executive Committee of the Forty-Eighters, Amos Pinchot, a member of the National Executive Committee, and O.M. Thomasson of the Non-Partisan League, addressed the amalgamated conventions.

The motion made by Swinburne Hale of the Committee of Forty-Eight that the two conventions should be one political party, although still nameless, was unanimously carried.

Miss Lillian Herstein, chairman of the Education and Organization Committee, presented the report on education, which recommended that there be a committee on education of the Labor Party located near the national headquarters to carry on intensive propaganda work, that the movement of Labor colleges for adults be endorsed, and that the Labor Party make the effort to have Labor represented on school boards.

### **Endorse Co-Op Movement.**

Robert M. Buck, chairman of the Resolutions Committee, presented a number of resolutions including an endorsement of the cooperative movement and the creation of a governmental committee for the interchange and friendly relations between Mexico and the interchange of teachers and students. A resolution offered by Alex Howatt condemned the Court of Industrial Relations and Governor Henry Allen of Kansas, and another asked that the national Labor Party demand that Mooney be given a just trial. The Russian blockade and the Russian policy of the present administration of the United States was condemned, sympathy was extended to the Indians in their struggle for independence [from Britain], laws for the prevention of lynching were demanded of Congress, the government was requested to act immediately to give the railroad workers a living wage, and the abuse of judicial power, which denies people citizenship on account of political beliefs, was protested.

### **Miss Alexander Objects.**

The reading of the resolutions was interrupted by Miss Melinda Alexander, acting secretary of the Committee of Forty-Eight, who objected to their passage on the ground that they were Labor Party not Committee of Forty-Eight resolutions, and moved that action should be taken all over again on all resolutions which had been passed before the amalgamation. Mr. Christensen again took the chair during the pandemonium which ensued and appointed a committee of Forty-Eighters to go over the resolutions passed by the Labor Party previous to the amalgamation and in any case they proved unacceptable, to ask for their reconsideration. There was no later objection.

The evening session was distinctly one of marking time while the Platform Committee of the merged bodies continued to thrash out differences. Dudley Field Malone warmed the assemblage with his oratory and Mr. Christensen, who acted as chairman of the evening meeting, gave out the cryptic message that LaFollette would like to lead the new party movement but that he thought he could serve his country better in another way and therefore he declined. The convention adjourned after it seemed hopeless that the

Platform Committee would be ready to make its report that night.

### ***Wednesday's Session [July 14, 1920].***

The morning session was another case of marking time until it was announced that the Platform Committee would be ready to make its report at 2:00 pm. The convention observed the fact that it was Bastille Day and joined in singing "The Marseillaise."

It was resolved in the opening of the afternoon session that voting should be by states in proportion to the number of electoral votes and not on the unit system.

### **Barlow Tries a Stampede.**

Chairman Walker then made the announcement from LaFollette that he would not be available as a candidate. At this point, Lester Barlow, organizer for the World War Veterans, mounted the platform and in an attempt to stampede the convention stated that there was an intrigue on the outside to keep LaFollette from running, and that the Senator's platform was as progressive as any which was being written in the committee room. Some delegates demanded to hear LaFollette's platform before the report of the Platform Committee had been made and a sudden stampede ensued when the picture of LaFollette was produced draped with the American flag while a huge red banner announcing the Senator for President was flung over the balcony. It took John H. Walker, with his cool persistence, almost a half hour to calm the convention down to the point where business could be continued.

It was ruled out of order to present any platform ahead of that of the Platform Committee. Robert M. Buck, chairman of the Platform Committee, presented the report agreed upon by 7 members of the committee after 42 hours of continuous work. Unknown to the other members of the committee, the 3 dissenters to the platform — Amos Pinchot, George L. Record, and Gilson Gardner, members of the Committee of Forty-Eight — had prepared a minority report which was presented to the convention by Mr. Record after the majority report was read and was offered as a sub-

stitute for the majority report. Mr. Record made the announcement, unaware of the statement previously issued by the chairman [Walker] that LaFollette had refused to run, that LaFollette would accept the nomination on the minority platform whereas he would not on the majority platform. The convention was almost stampeded again until Mr. Record withdrew his statement.

Abraham Lefkowitz, Vice President of the American Federation of Teachers, defended the majority platform and pointed out that the minority report did not include political equality for the negro, and that it supplemented “effective share” of Labor in the control of industry with all the ambiguity which that term implies for “an ever increasing share in the responsibilities and management of industry.”

Gilson Gardner defended the minority report and Gilbert Roe, LaFollette’s former law partner, refuted statements that had been made by stating that democratic control was not in the LaFollette platform, that equality of the races had not been discussed, and that an Irish plank was in preparation.

The tide was turned for the majority report after an impassioned defense made by Robert M. Buck. Said Mr. Buck:

There is no such thing as absolutism in expediency, but the question is where to stop compromising merely to get votes. The 3 members of the Committee of Forty-Eight who presented the minority report represented themselves, not the Committee of Forty-Eight. The job of this platform is not to elect a President in 1920. It is to build the foundation of a party which will grow and free the people of the United States. We have no use for a liberal party now. The workers, both of hand and brain, are tired of wishy-washy pronouncements on political subjects. What we need is a radical party. We compromised with the minority members of the committee to the extent of taking out of the platform the control of the railroads under the Plumb Plan. We substituted for nationalization of mines a term which the workers understood, government ownership with democratic control. We gave up the capital levy and a plank denouncing

capitalist sabotage of production. Finally, we came to a point where we had to stop compromising. Then the compromising stopped.

The vote which followed Mr. Buck’s speech defeated the minority report and the majority report was unanimously adopted. A plank on education was offered by E.D. MacDougal of Kansas and after considerable discussion was incorporated into the platform.

The evening session was devoted to the selecting of a name for the new party and the nomination of the standard bearers.

Several names were suggested for the party, including the American Party, the People’s Party, the Columbia party, the United Party of Labor, Farmers and Liberals, and the Labor Party. But the Farmer-Labor Party was almost the unanimous choice of the delegation.

LaFollette being unavailable, his name being withdrawn again from the platform by his son, the convention turned to two men from among its members who squarely stood for the platform as finally adopted — Parley P. Christensen of Utah and Dudley Field Malone of New York. Eugene V. Debs, whose name was later withdrawn at the request of the Socialist Party, Lynn J. Frazier, nominated against his wishes, Henry Ford, Herbert Bigelow, Louis F. Post, Jane Addams, and John Fitzpatrick were also named. In the first ballot Malone ran ahead of Christensen, with 166 votes against the latter’s 121. With the elimination of Debs, who polled 68 votes despite the withdrawal of his name, and the other candidates, who together polled 30 votes, Christensen beat in the final race.

Max Hayes for Vice President was opposed only by Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt and Lester Barlow, organizer of the World War Veterans. Mrs. Catt received 2 votes and Barlow, 16. The convention adjourned at 5:00 Thursday morning.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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