

# Farmer-Labor Unity

*By Howard Y. Williams*

**W**ORKERS on farms and in the city tend to work together, and it is only when they are deceived that they are driven apart.

There are many instances in which they have cooperated splendidly together. In the experience of the Non-Partisan League which won control of the government of North Dakota following World War I, farmers and workers united in the legislature to pass the most fundamental legislation ever enacted by any state. Huge vested interests were checked in their excesses through the state's public insurance, its mill and elevator, state bank, and a state housing program.

In Minnesota, the Farmer Labor Party was in control from 1930-1938. The legislature enacted royalty and tonnage taxes on iron ore that brought millions of dollars into the coffers of the state, and made possible the reduction of taxes on homesteads. Enlarged services to cooperatives, better labor legislation, increased activities by state institutions, and the banning of foreclosures on farms and homes during the depression resulted.

In Wisconsin, farmers and workers united in the Farmer Labor Progressive Federation, and formed a rank and file movement to influence the Progressive Party of that state. There is no question but that over the years in Wisconsin, in the Socialist Party under Victor Berger, and in the progressive movement under old "Bob" LaFollette, the workers and farmers made possible one of the best governed states in the nation.

In Oregon and Washington, the Commonwealth Federations of those states worked out a similar program of cooperation. In Canada today the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation is welding workers of city and farm into a vigorous political movement that bids fair to exert great influence in the Dominion.

Entrenched wealth fears such cooperation, and has used large sums of money and all the avenues of information through newspapers and radio to defeat such combinations. During these past months controlled newspapers, radio commentators and advertising have been used to unjustly paint labor as obstructing the war effort. Many farmers have been deceived by this propaganda, and alienated from labor. In the 1942 election, farmers and workers tended largely to vote on the opposite side of the fence. If this trend continues, it means that democracy will be greatly weakened, that the war effort will not be as effective, and that the peace is likely to be sold down the river by the reactionaries, as it was following the last war.

Rural and city workers will pay dearly if inflation comes. European experience with inflation was devastating to the common people and finally landed them in the lap of fascism. It was the inflation of land prices here in the last war that made tenants out of thousands of farm owners—mostly to insurance companies. They lost all their equity, were slaves to the land as they tried for years to carry the interest load, and then they lost everything.

## RESOURCES MONOPOLY

In any realistic political program, workers and farmers should emphasize that government revenue should come from a tax on land values. The monopoly control of many of our natural resources is more and more evident as the war progresses. The American Aluminum Company has almost complete control of bauxite, basic for the production of aluminum. The United States Steel controls a large share of the iron mines of the Nation. Anaconda Copper has a similar control of copper. So it is with oil, tin, coal, lumber, etc. These resources constitute a wealth provided for all mankind. They belong to all the people, and not to the person or corporation that happens to have title to the top-soil.

America's record of rampant waste of lumber, oil, gas and soil is one of the shocking stories of history. Minnesota, Wisconsin, and other states are miles of cut-over land laid bare by the lumber barons in their ruthless exploitation. It will take generations to replace this waste by a careful program of reforestation. Planned cutting of the timber would have preserved the land and the forests and been a continuous source of wealth for the state.

The Progressives of Minnesota early saw this problem and finally forced through the legislature royalty and tonnage taxes on iron ore which have brought several million dollars each year into the treasury of the state. Under the administration of Governor Elmer A. Benson, a Farmer Laborite, the taxes were increased to 10½ percent. Governor Harold A. Stassen, a stooge of the U. S. Steel Corporation, permitted the Lake Erie price for iron ore, which is the basis for taxation, to be reduced, for the purpose of decreasing the tax upon that corporation. So in spite of the fact that more iron ore is being shipped from Minnesota than ever in its history, the amount received by the state is less. But even under a conservative governor, the people of Minnesota are receiving huge sums of money through this tax, which means a decrease of other taxation. In the *Saturday*

*Evening Post* for May 15, Governor Stassen deplors the capital gains tax, much of which absorbs economic rent, and pleads for an overall consumer tax to finance postwar public works.

There is the experience of a neighboring state, South Dakota. In the Black Hills, are the richest gold mines in the world. William Randolph Hearst, the main stockholder, has worked through his political stooges a technique preventing any tax on land values in that state. These politicians concentrated on the Senate, holding control over a majority of its members, so that no such legislation could get through. Not a state in the whole area was so hard hit during the depression. Here was a natural resource being removed from the state, and making millions of dollars for Hearst and his associates, yet yielding practically nothing for the social needs of that state. The situation became so flagrant that finally the Hearst wire-pullers permitted a small severance tax to go through to quiet the protests.

Farmers and workers must cooperate to see that land values are assessed to drain off excess profits of the monopoly corporations capitalizing on the war. Farmers have no reason to fear such a land tax, for it is based not on area, but on intrinsic worth. Farm im-

provements are generally worth more than their land, and like urban labor, farmers would be relieved of taxes on production, which now take such a toll on their skill and labor.

We are going to win the war, but as things are going today we may very likely lose the peace. The policy of our State Department in North Africa in setting up men like Peyrouton and Nogues in places of power, the building up of Franco of Spain, Otto of Austria, the House of Savoy in Italy, Bruening of Germany, all as a clerico-fascist *cordon sanitaire* to hem in Russia, and the unwillingness to be courageous in meeting the refugee problem, all means that we can win the war and yet lose all that we are fighting for.

The 1944 election is going to tell the story as to whether the victory in war will mean a victory in peace. If the obstructionists and isolationist-imperialists win that election, we shall have a repetition of 1920.

Whenever and wherever farmers and workers cooperate they build progress. This has been true in the influence they have exerted in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, and in the part that they have played in the United Nations. The future for a progressive, democratic America depends on their working together here.

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# The People's Lobby

By Colston Warne

IT may come as a surprise to many Americans to learn that there is a People's Lobby in Washington operated on a modest budget, but possessed of a vigor which resulted from the effective work of its founder and Executive Secretary, Benjamin C. Marsh. For more than twenty years Congressional hearings have witnessed a tall, lank, vigorous figure stepping to the fore to present the case of the people. Congressmen early recognized Ben Marsh as a master in the give and take of debate. They have learned to respect his integrity and judgment.

The People's Lobby has never been a mass organization. It has been supported on about \$8,000 a year, a sum which has sufficed to publish a monthly bulletin, at least one sizable pamphlet every year, and to pour forth a stream of nearly 200,000 circulars a year. In its headquarters at 1410 H Street, N.W., are memoranda on finance, clippings from papers, summaries of releases, piled high along the walls, but its most valuable asset is the knowledge by its Executive Secretary of all of the scamps and all the angels in Washington, and his capacity to make life increasingly unpleasant for the scamps.

The organization was founded in 1920 as "The People's Reconstruction League." Its birth was the outgrowth of alarm on the part of farmer and labor groups over the election of President Warren G. Hard-

ing of "normalcy" fame. Its chief supporters were then the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, the Brotherhood of Firemen and Enginemen, the International Association of Machinists, the International Electrical Workers, and the Brotherhood of Railway Conductors. A Republican State Senator from Michigan headed the League, whose program centered on progressive taxation and food control.

In the early twenties the People's Reconstruction League led the campaign which resulted in the Packer and Stockyards Act of 1920, an act which sought to correct the abuses made public by the Federal Trade Commission. Opposition was also voiced to the imperialist designs of the United States in Latin America.

During the middle twenties the organization's name was changed to "The People's Lobby," and in 1928, John Dewey, Columbia educator and philosopher, was elected its President, a position which he retained until 1936. When Mr. Dewey took over the Presidency, some of the more conservative members objected to the new name. Labor had in this period become highly conservative. A number of unions had entered banking, and a spirit of labor capitalism dwarfed the demand for reform. By 1929, the major labor organizations had deserted the Lobby.

The conservative trend in labor did not, however, alter the Lobby's program, and individual support was