
On Bolshevization and a Labor Party: Speech to the 5th Plenum of the Enlarged Executive Committee of the Communist International, Moscow — March 30, 1925.

by James P. Cannon

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The problem of Bolshevization in America has certain concrete aspects: The problem is concurrent with the problem of organizing the party, for we are *at the beginning of the task of forming a communist party in America*, and the situation is different from the countries of Europe. We never had a revolutionary mass movement in America and have few traditions and experiences to draw upon. We have a large proletariat in America, but the party has only 20,000 members of which only 2,000 are in the English-speaking organizations. The American proletariat is politically very backward and the most elementary tasks are necessary in the attempt to set it in motion.

We must develop the propaganda of Marxist-Leninist theory. In this sense I agree with comrade Bela Kun's report. The party developed from two sources—the Socialist Party, which never had any Marxian theory, and the syndicalist organizations, which also neglected theoretical questions. But in training a cadre of functionaries we must be careful not to train functionaries separate from the masses. We must be careful with the term professional revolutionaries — they must be workshop revolutionaries primarily. From the Central Committee to the lowest organization the party must attain a more working class character. The tendency toward dilettantism and careerism must be combated.

We have two fundamental problems: (1) *trade union work* and (2) *shop nuclei organization*. Trade union work has been more or less neglected because the weakness of the trade unions made the work very

difficult. We must combat the tendency to neglect this work, and instead must actually help to build up the trade unions themselves. The second problem, that of organizing shop nuclei, is very important although its solution does not alone solve the problem of Bolshevization.

Our main difficulties are: (1) *we are a small party in a big industrial country*; (2) *the trade union movement is very weak*; (3) *our party is divided into foreign-language groups*, each with its own national apparatus, and each tending toward specializing in the problems peculiar to the group. The Language Federation form of organization is absolutely incompatible with a Bolshevik organization. We must have a centralized form of organization or we will never be a Bolshevik party.

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Now as to the *question of the Labor Party*. It is not quite correct to compare our situation with that of England. The British Labour Party is an old party, and is supported by the entire trade union movement. The British trade union movement is much stronger than the American movement. There is no labor party in America. All attempts to create one in the past two years have been disastrous failures. The organized American workers are not yet class-conscious enough to develop a labor party on a mass basis, founded on the trade unions, and we want no other kind. We want no Communist labor party, for such a party will become a small group separated from the masses. A real

mass labor party based on the trade unions, and not restricted to Communists, will be a great step forward, and in forming such a party we can learn from the experiences of the past two years. Such a labor party must be (1) a mass organization; (2) based on the trade unions; (3) a general labor movement in which the Communists can work, but in which they will not lose their identity. Under present conditions there can be no question of organizing such a labor party. The thing for us to do now is to conduct agitation and propaganda based on the concrete immediate problems of the workers and to raise the issue of independent political action and an independent party in connection with them. We must bring the workers into conflict with the petty-bourgeois ideas. It would be premature to form a labor party now, and even dangerous, for we would quickly become isolated from this growing mass labor movement. We know this from our own experience of the past two years, and especially in connection with the Federated Farmer-Labor Party and the St. Paul convention. We hope for the assistance of our Russian comrades, so that our movement will not be derailed and sidetracked and will not become the victim of experimental theories. Concrete issues are in the foreground of our problems. The American workers still follow the parties of big capital or the petty-bourgeois movement of LaFollette. We must reach the masses and set them into motion in the class struggle. Our means for doing this is *united front struggles* on the basis of the concrete immediate problems of the workers.

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