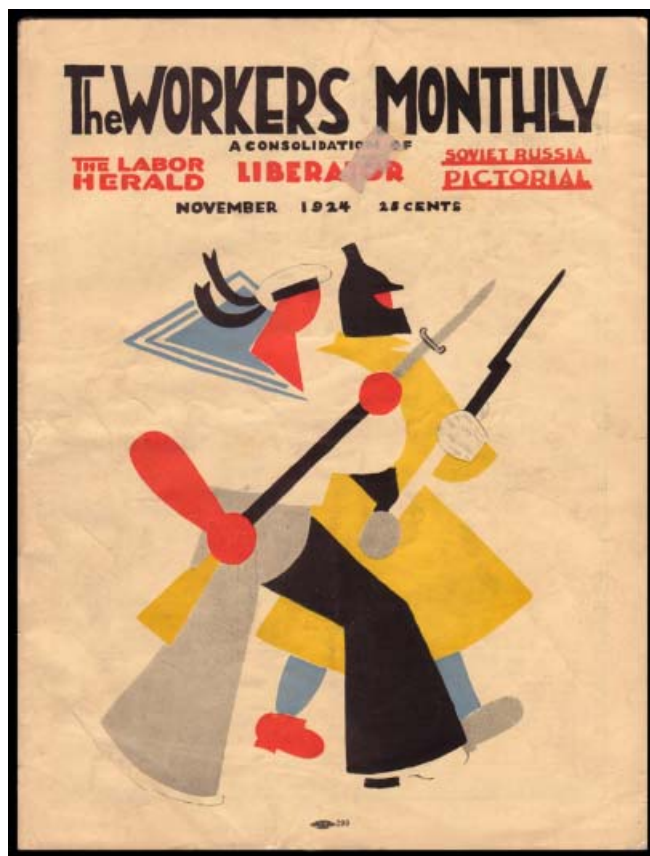

The Bolshevization of the Party.

by James P. Cannon

Speech of Oct. 5, 1924, published in *The Workers Monthly*, v. 4, no. 1 (Nov. 1924), pp. 34-37. Reprinted in *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism: Selected Writings and Speeches, 1920-1928*. (New York: Spartacist Publishing Co., 1992), pp. 232-243.

The founding of the Workers Party school in New York City has a great significance for the party and must be regarded as a real achievement. It is one of many signs that the American Communist movement, which already has five years of



struggle behind it, is hammering itself into shape, overcoming its weaknesses, striving in real earnestness to throw off the encumbrances which it inherited from the past and to transform itself into a genuine party of Leninism.

We are well aware that our party is not yet a

Bolshevik party in the complete sense of the term. But we can say that after five years we have succeeded in crystallizing at least a strong nucleus within the party which endeavors to adopt a real Leninist standpoint on every question which confronts the party. It is characteristic of such comrades that they regard the adherence of our party to the Communist International not as a formal affair, but as an inseparable part of its being, which shapes and colors all of its activities, something that penetrates into the very marrow of its bones. For them, the word of the Communist International is decisive in all party questions. It is as one of such comrades that I wish to speak here tonight.

The Fifth Congress of the Communist International [June 17-July 8, 1924] has completed its work. It has examined and appraised the world situation. It has gone deeply into the experiences of all of the most important parties during the period since the Fourth Congress [Nov. 5-Dec. 5, 1922], as well as into the work of the International as a whole. The judgment finally arrived at has been compressed into a series of resolutions and theses which are now available for the Communist parties of the entire world. They constitute a clear guide for our future activities.

The Slogan of the Fifth Congress.

The congress found that all of the parties of the International, with the exception of the Rus-

sian party, are still far short of the requirements of a Bolshevik party. The traditions, customs, and habits of the past are like leaden weights on their feet. They lack the Bolshevik discipline, the iron hardness, the capacity for decisive action, the mobile form of organization, and the strong theoretical foundation which a party of Leninism must have.

The congress demanded an energetic struggle against all these weaknesses and defects and the slogan of this struggle is "The Bolshevization of the party!"

Our educational work, as well as all other phases of our party life, must be carefully scrutinized and examined in the light of this slogan. When we come to speak of theory and theoretical work, we put our finger at once on one of the weakest spots in the American movement. This has always been the case. The American labor movement, in common with the labor movements of practically all the Anglo-Saxon countries, has a traditional indifference to theory. There is a widespread tendency to draw a line between theory and practice. The typical labor leader boasts of being a practical man who "has no time for theory." We encounter the same point of view quite often even in the ranks of our party.

Such a tendency is bound to lead the party into a blind alley. We must fight against it in a determined and organized manner. The party educational work must be organized in a systematic way and pushed forward with tenfold energy. Our educational work up to now has been practically negligible and that is all the more reason for making haste now.

Fundamental Importance of Theory.

In connection with this work it is necessary continually to stress the fundamental importance of revolutionary theory. Comrade Lenin said, "Without a revolutionary theory, a revolutionary movement is impossible." These words must be-

come a part of the consciousness of every member of the party. It must become obvious to all that the working class will be able to come into open collision with the capitalist order, to dismantle it and to set up in its place the Communist form of society — to accomplish the task which history has set for it — only if at every turn of the road, in every phase of the struggle, it is guided by a correct revolutionary theory.

The spectacle is familiar to all of us, of militant workers starting out with a great hatred of capitalist oppression and a will to fight against it, but drifting along, because of lack of knowledge of the capitalist system and of the means by which it may be overthrown, into a policy which leads them to actual support of the capitalist system. The participation of many thousands of discontented workers in the LaFollette movement is an instance of this. We know that the typical labor leaders of America, who say they have no theory, carry out in actual practice the theory of the bourgeoisie and constitute strong pillars of support for the bourgeois system. There is no such thing as "no theory" in the labor movement. Two social systems are in conflict with each other, the capitalist system and the Communist. One must be guided either by the theory of revolution which leads to the Communist order of society or he will follow a line of action which leads to support of the present order. That is to say that, in effect, he adapts himself to the theory of the present order. "No theory" in the labor movement is the theory of the bourgeoisie.

Without revolutionary theory, the workers, even with the best will in the world, cannot fight the capitalist system successfully. This statement holds good, not merely in the question of the final revolutionary struggle for power, it applies equally in every aspect of the daily struggle. Workers who have no understanding of the theory of revolution cannot follow a consistent line of action that leads toward it. Behind every action aimed at the bourgeoisie, there must be the theory

of the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie. False policies in the ranks of the workers, whereby even their own good will and energy is transformed into a force operating against their own interests, spring in the first place from false theory. Only by an understanding of the revolutionary nature of their struggle, and of the necessity of shaping their actions in the light of this theory and adapting them to the execution of it, can the workers follow a systematic policy of opposition to the bourgeoisie and of defense of their own interests. Revolutionary theory is not something separate from action, but is the guiding principle of all revolutionary action.

What “Bolshevization” Means.

The Fifth Congress of the Communist International dealt with the mistakes made by various sections during the period between the Fourth and Fifth Congresses which, in the case of the German party, led to most disastrous results, and laid these mistakes at the door of incorrect theory, of deviation from the line of Marxism and Leninism. It declared that both the opportunistic errors of the right and the sectarian errors of the left represent deviations from the line of the Communist International, which is the embodiment of the theory of Marx and Lenin. The crisis in the German Communist Party, which became evident at the time of the October 1923 retreat, was declared by the Fifth Congress to be the result of the influence of the remnants of the old social-democratic ideology which still existed within the Communist Party of Germany. This also applies to our party and the remedy for this state of affairs, in the language of the propaganda thesis of the Fifth Congress, is to “Bolshevize the party!”

The propaganda thesis says: The Bolshevization of the party in this sense means the final ideological victory of Marxism and Leninism, or in other words, of Marxism in the period of imperialism and the epoch of the proletarian revolu-

tion, and to reject the Marxism of the Second International and the remnants of the elements of syndicalism.

The Bolshevization of the party, therefore, like all slogans of the Communist International, means not a mechanical formula, but a struggle. In this case it is a struggle against false ideology in the party. The Bolshevization of the party, for us, means the struggle for the conquest of the party for the ideology of Marxism and Leninism.

To quote again from the thesis: “The complete and rapid Bolshevizing of the Communist parties can be obtained in the process of the deliberate revolutionary activity of the sections of the Communist International, by more deeply hammering Marxism and Leninism into the consciousness of the Communist parties and the party members.”

The Bolshevization of the party is a process and the means towards the end is an ideological struggle. The Workers School, in common with all educational institutions set up by the party, must be a weapon for this struggle. Under no circumstances can we conceive of it as a neutral academy standing between the various tendencies and currents of the party, but as a fighting instrument against all deviations both to the right and to the left, and for the overcoming of the confusion of the party members and for the “hammering into the consciousness of the party and the party members, Marxism and Leninism.”

Take Comintern Slogan Seriously.

This conception imposes giant tasks upon the Workers School. There is much confusion in our ranks. This we must all admit frankly. Such a state of affairs is to be expected in a party which up to now has devoted little attention to theoretical work and which has had little revolutionary experience, but we must begin now in a determined fashion to cope with this condition and to overcome it.

A particularly dangerous form of confusion and irresponsibility, which we must conquer by frontal attack without delay, is the formal and even frivolous attitude which is sometimes manifested in regard to the relations of our party and our party members to the Communist International. We hear the Bolshevization of the party spoken of here and there as though it were a joke, not to be taken seriously. The very utterance of such a sentiment is in itself an evidence of theoretical weakness. Communists cannot take such a light-hearted attitude towards the Communist International. Let us say at the very beginning, and let everybody understand once and for all: The international organization of the revolutionary proletariat and the leadership of the World Congress is, in itself, an inseparable part of our theory. The very fact that any party members are able to regard the slogan of the Fifth Congress as a joke is a great proof of the need for this slogan in our party.

The Cause of Factionalism.

If we examine closely the state of affairs within our party now, and for the five years that it has been in existence, we are bound to come to the conclusion, as did the Fifth Congress in regard to the International as a whole, that the internal conflicts and crises, as well as the mistakes made by the party in the field of its external activities, can be traced directly to ideological weakness, to the incomplete assimilation by the party of Marxism and Leninism. In other words it still carries with it the dead weight of the past and has not yet become a Bolshevik party.

The thesis on tactics of the Fifth Congress lays down five separate specifications which are the special features of a really Bolshevik party. One of them is the following:

“It (a Bolshevik party) must be a centralized party prohibiting factions, tendencies and groups. It must be a monolithic party hewn of one piece.”

What shall we say of our party if we mea-

sure by this standard? From the very beginning, and even up to the present day, our party has been plagued with factions, tendencies and groups. At least one-half of the energy of the party has been expended in factional struggles, one after another. We have even grown into the habit of accepting this state of affairs as a normal condition. We have gone to the extent of putting a premium upon factionalism by giving factional representation in the important committees of the party.

Of course, this condition cannot be eliminated by formal decree. We cannot eliminate factions and factional struggles by declaring them undesirable. No, we shall make the first step toward eliminating factions, tendencies and groups, toward creating a monolithic party in the sense of the Fifth Congress declaration, only if at the beginning we recognize the basic cause of the condition, if we recognize that the existence in our party of factions, tendencies and groups runs directly counter to Leninism, to the Leninist conception of what a revolutionary proletarian party should be.

Then we will proceed, in true Leninist fashion, to overcome the difficulty. Not mechanically, not by organizational measures alone, but by an ideological and political struggle which has for its object the creation of a uniform and consistent proletarian class ideology in the party ranks. The problem of factions, tendencies and groups is not an organizational problem merely, it is a political problem and for political problems there are no mechanical solutions.

We must conceive of the Workers School as one of the best weapons in our hands for the fight to develop a uniform proletarian ideology in the party ranks and to overcome all deviations from it.

False Conceptions of Education.

The American revolutionary movement has had in the past, and still has in many sections,

even in a section of the party, queer and false conceptions of the nature of revolutionary education. We are all acquainted with that class of “educators” who reduce education to the study of books and separate the study of books from the conduct of the daily struggle. We know of that old school of “educators” whom we used to call the “surplus value” school, who imagined that if a worker learned something of the nature of the capitalist system of society, the process by which it exploits him and by which it expropriates the major product of his labor, that his education is complete.

We have no place for such a static and one-sided conception of revolutionary education. In all our work, the analysis of capitalist society and the study of the mechanics of capitalist exploitation must be directly and originally connected with the Marxian theory of the state and the process by which the proletariat will overthrow it and set up their own order of society. We must give short shrift to those pseudo-Marxists who convert Marxism into a “theory” separate from struggle. According to our conceptions, Marxism and Leninism constitute both the theory and practice of the proletarian revolution, and it is in this sense that the Workers School must teach Marxism, and must impart it to the students of the school.

Genuine Leninist education cannot by any means be separated from the daily activities and the daily struggles of the party. It must be organically connected with these struggles. No one can become a real Leninist if he studies in a glass case. We must discourage, and the Workers School must fight with all its means against, any such conception.

Education Must Be Partisan.

Correct revolutionary education is partisan education. It must bear the stamp of Marx and Lenin, and no other stamp. Only the theory and teachings of Marxism and Leninism are revolu-

tionary. They cannot be harmonized with any other theory, for no other theory is revolutionary. The Workers School cannot be natural or tolerant. It must scrutinize, ten times over, every item in its curriculum, and every utterance of its instructors from the standpoint of their adherence to the teachings of Marx and Lenin.

There is a phrase entitled “labor education” which is current in the labor movement. There is no such thing as “labor education.” “Education” is given from the revolutionary standpoint of Marx and Lenin or it is “education” which leads to a conformity and an adaptation to the bourgeois order. This fact must never be lost sight of in any of our educational work. We must be intransigent in this conception of education and so must the Workers School. We must be “narrow-minded” and intolerant on this score, imparting knowledge or culture not from any “general” standpoint, which in the last analysis becomes the standpoint of the bourgeoisie, but from the standpoint only of Marxism and Leninism. There is a conception of this so-called labor education, in my opinion utterly false, which has become widespread. Scott Nearing recently expressed the opinion that the “United Front” tactic should be applied in workers’ schools.

Our answer to this point of view is that if there is one place where the united front should not be applied it is the field of education. According to our point of view, the only theory which correctly analyzes capitalist society and correctly maps out the road of the struggle for its overthrow is the theory of Marxism and Leninism. We cannot find a common meeting ground with any other theory or any other brand of education. The Workers School does not represent a united front in the field of education. The Workers School must be a partisan school, a weapon in the hands of the party for implanting the party ideology in the minds of the students who attend its classes.

Theory in Our Trade Union Work.

I should like to deal now with the question of education in connection with our trade union activities. I speak with particular reference to the trade union activities because at the present time it is our main field of work, although the points made apply to all fields of activity in the daily struggle. Our party members in the trade unions are obliged to carry out widespread and many-sided activities, the sum total of which comprises a very large percentage of our party work. This is rightly so, because the trade unions are the basic and elementary organizations of the proletariat, and the success of our party, in its efforts to become a party of the masses, depends to a very large extent upon its ability to work in the trade unions and to follow out a correct policy in all of its work there.

To arrive at the correct policy in dealing with the complex problems which constantly come up in the trade unions, a firm grasp on theory is absolutely indispensable. However, theory is badly lacking in this field amongst the comrades in the ranks, who have to carry out the work.

The reason for this is obvious. The members who join our party directly from the trade unions come to it as a rule because they are drawn to the party in the daily struggle over immediate questions. They become convinced, by seeing our party in action and working with it, that it is a real party of the workers which fights for the immediate interests of the workers, and on that basis the workers come to the party. As a rule they do not go through a course of study before admission and do not inquire very deeply into the fundamental theory upon which the party's whole life and activity is founded.

Consequently, for our comrades in the trade unions to attempt to work out a line of tactics in relation to the employers, in relation to the reactionary labor leaders, progressive labor leaders and various other currents and tendencies in the trade

union movement, and to coordinate everything with our general political aims, their own empiric experience is not a sufficient foundation. They are bound to become overpractical if they have no other guide, and to drift into tactics which lead them inevitably away from the revolutionary struggle. The Communists in the trade unions can be successful only if they approach all of their tasks from the standpoint of correct revolutionary theory and have all of their activities imbued with this theory.

Two serious errors manifest themselves in the party in connection with theory and practical work in the trade unions. On the one hand we are confronted, every now and then, with a prejudice on the part of the rank and file workers in the trade unions against theory and theoreticians and a resentment against any interference of this kind in their work. All the party leaders, especially the comrades leading our trade union work, have encountered this prejudice. On the other hand we frequently see comrades who have gained all their knowledge from books and who have had no experience in the actual struggle of the workers, especially comrades who can be classified under the general heading of "intellectuals," adopting a condescending and superior attitude towards the comrades who do the practical work of the party in the daily struggles in the unions. They take a pedagogical and supervisory attitude towards the trade union comrades and thus antagonize them and lose the possibility of influencing them and learning from them.

Both these attitudes are false, and in my opinion the Workers School must help the party to overcome them by systematic, persistent, and determined opposition to both. We must oppose the prejudice of some of the practical trade union comrades, who are new in the party and who have not yet assimilated its main theories, against theory and party workers theoretically trained. We must oppose and resist in the most determined fashion any tendency on their part to separate their work

from the political and theoretical work of the party and to resent the introduction of theoretical and political questions into their discussion of the daily work in the unions. And likewise, to the comrades who have book knowledge only, we must make it clear that the theory of the party gets its life only when it is related to the practical daily struggle and becomes a part of the equipment of the comrades who carry on the struggle. They must learn how to approach the practical workers and collaborate with them in the most fraternal and comradely manner, and they must not under any circumstance adopt a superior and pedagogical attitude towards them. This very attitude in itself manifests an ideological defect. A Communist intellectual who cannot identify himself with the trade unionists in the party and make himself one with them is not worth his salt.

Organic Connection of Theory and Practice.

The separation of theory and practice, the arbitrary line between theoretical work and practical work, the arbitrary division of activity into theoretical activity and practical activity, must be combatted and overcome. We must set up against it the conception of the organic connection between theoretical and practical work, and of fraternal collaboration between theoretically trained comrades and comrades carrying out the practical work in the daily struggle, especially in the trade union movement.

Our party, in common with the other parties of the International, is confronted by two dangers which militate against its effectiveness in the class struggle. One of the dangers is left sectarianism, which is a deviation from the line of Marxism and Leninism in the direction of syndicalism, and the other is right opportunism, which is defined in the Fifth Congress resolution as a deviation from Leninism in the direction of the emasculated Marxism of the Second International.

These dangers can be overcome and the party remain on the right road only if it succeeds in carrying on a successful struggle against these deviations. Educational work is an important means to this end.

Educational work therefore is not a mere academic activity. In a certain sense it is a fight. It is a fight to overcome these dangers by building in the party ranks a true and firm and uniform proletarian ideology. It must help the party in the fight against right deviations without falling back into the error of deviations to the left. The Workers School must be for the party one of the most important means by which we impress in the minds of the party members a knowledge of Marxian and Leninist theory, of developing a respect for theory and an understanding of its fundamental importance, without falling into the error of teaching theory in an abstract manner and separating it from the daily activities of the party.

Our party must be at the same time a party of theory and a party of struggle, with theory and struggle closely interlocked and inseparable. Without allowing the party members to develop into mere faultfinders, the school must help them to acquire the faculty of criticism, of subjecting every action and every utterance of the party to criticism from the standpoint of its conformity to the basic theory of the movement. We do not want a party consisting half of critics and half of practical workers, but every party member must be at the same time a critic and a constructive worker.

The party must be a party of study and struggle. All the party members must be trained to become thinkers and doers. These conceptions carried out in actual practice will be the means whereby we can rapidly transform our party into a Communist Party in the true sense of the word.

Party Support for Educational Work.

We have every reason to be proud of the response the Workers School has met in the ranks

of the party membership of New York. The enthusiastic support it has already gained gives us the hope that our educational work, which we have so long neglected, can now be developed extensively and that all who are most active and alive in the party will join in the task of making it move forward.

The party members in New York should look upon the Workers School as their own institution, as their own party educational center which, by fraternal collaboration of all the comrades, can be built and maintained as a real leader in the fight for Leninist ideology in the party, in the fight to shake off the paralyzing inheritance of the past and to merge in the shortest possible time, through the process of careful study and vigorous struggle, into a party complying with the specifications of a Bolshevik party which were laid down by the Fifth Congress.

That is: "A central monolithic party hewn of one piece."

That is: "Essentially a revolutionary and Marxist party, undeviating, in spite of all circumstances proceeding towards the goal and making every effort to bring nearer the hour of the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie."

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