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# Problems of the Party — IV: Be American!

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Published in *The Worker* [New York], v. 6, whole no. 276 (May 26, 1923), pg. 5.

The Workers Party has no less than 16 Federations. Every Federation has its own language. The majority of our party consists of foreign-born workers. A great political and organizational skill is required to keep this modern Babel together in one party. The 20,000 members of our party would exercise a 10-fold dynamic power if they would speak one language. The party has 9 dailies, with a circulation of 90,000, and 21 weeklies, with a circulation of 70,000. The great political and propaganda power of this press is immeasurably diminished through being split into a score of languages.

This division into 16 languages is the greatest obstacle to the development of the Workers Party as a political factor.†

And it is not only the languages which vary in our Federations, but very often even the ideology. Our Russian comrades have a different historical tradition from the Italians, the Germans from the Poles. The workers belonging to various nationalities are still very deeply rooted in the social and political conditions of their old countries. The greatest event for the Italians is Fascism in Italy. For the German workers, the occupation of the Ruhr; for the Hungarian workers, the White Terror of Horthy. For the Polish workers, the heroic election fight of our brothers in Poland. For the Russian comrades, the miracle of Soviet Russia, so dear to all of us.

The agitation and propaganda of our comrades in the 16 Language Federations centers mainly around these great events in their respective countries. And

yet, all the members of the Language Federations are living here in the United States.

We likewise observe the most enthusiastic activities of our comrades in the Federations to be in closest connection with their old countries. Our Italian comrades arrange a collection for the persecuted Communists of Italy, our German comrades send relief for the hungry children of German Communists. Our Hungarian comrades put forth great efforts to collect money for political prisoners suffering in Horthy's prisons. Our Polish comrades have made a collection for the support of the Communist election campaign in Poland. Our Ukrainian comrades collect money for the support of the Ukrainian publishing activities in Europe. Our Russian comrades are of course with heart and soul interested in relief of Soviet Russia. Our Jewish comrades collect money for needy Jewish workers in the Ukraine.

If we look through the press of the various Federations of the Workers Party, we find with few exceptions very little about the political and social struggle of this country. If one were to read the 9 dailies and 21 weeklies of the Workers Party carefully, one would get the complete picture of all European countries, but a very incomplete picture of the political life in America. And yet we should not forget that all these workers, speaking various languages, are living here in the United States, that they are exploited by capitalists here, that they are oppressed by the capitalist government of the United States.

Of course, everything which interests our Fed-

†- These 16 Language Federations of 1923 were the following: Czechoslovak [Czech and Slovak], Estonian, Finnish, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Jewish [Yiddish], Lettish [Latvian], Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Scandinavian [Swedish and Norwegian], South Slavic [Croatian and Slovenian], and Ukrainian. The next year would see the addition of yet another Federation, the Armenian. There were thus more than 16 languages used in the WPA — Pepper's reference to "a score of languages" was no exaggeration.

erations is really very important. To be a Communist means to be an Internationalist. Fascism, occupation of the Ruhr, Horthy terror, Polish elections, and first and foremost Soviet Russia, are all absolutely important for us all. All this is part of the world reaction and world revolution. But here in this country, our first duty is to struggle against the American part of the world reaction, and to advance the American part of the world revolution. It is not Internationalism when our Italian comrades concern themselves first and foremost with Italy, the Germans with Germany, the Hungarians with Hungary, but it is an uninternational reversion to nationalism. It is the unpleasant truth, but for that very reason it must be stated that many of our Federations are in many respects still national Ghettos. And we must affirm that a Ghetto remains a Ghetto even if instead of the yellow badge, the red badge is worn.

### **Why the Lack of Interest in American Political Life?**

What has caused so many of our Federations to stick to these national Ghettos? What has caused so great a part of our comrades to interest themselves so little in American politics?

Two important causes are responsible for this.

First, the general tradition of the American working class. For 40 years, Gompers and the American Federation of Labor have preached the unimportance of politics. For 40 years the American Federation of Labor has taught that the workers should not concern themselves too much with the government, and that legislation should not interfere too much in the affairs of capital and labor. This apolitical conception has been reinforced from the left through the IWW, which has a naive fear of political activity. Nor is the political tradition of the Socialist Party very brilliant. The Socialist Party even in its best days has never understood how to bring down their policy from the heaven of doctrinal principles to the earth of the daily interests of the laboring masses. Naturally, this apolitical tradition could not have survived for years if material conditions had not made it possible. The absence of a centralized government which interferes in the daily life of every worker has been the main factor of the one-sided trade union or the one-sided doctrinaire sectar-

ian attitude of the American labor movement in its whole past.

The second reason which is responsible for this lack of interest in American political life is the composition of our party membership. The majority of our comrades are foreign-born workers. A great part of our comrades are not citizens. A great part of them speak only their mother-tongue, and do not understand the English language at all or understand it only slightly. The foreign-born workers often do not feel at home here in America; their attitude is that they have no right to interfere in the political life of the United States. The non-citizens are deprived even of the most elementary political rights. Without a knowledge of the English language it is naturally very hard to follow the political life of a country which rests on the fiction of a unified English-speaking nation.

### **A Big Berlitz School of the Political Struggle?**

It is a vital question for our party that our comrades take active part in the political life of this country. But this is possible only with their active participation in the general American life.

What should we do? How can we attain this goal? How can we elevate our party to becoming a factor in American political life?

It would be a betrayal of the working class if we accepted the solution advanced by the yellow *New York Call*, that we should count only the English-speaking workers as a political factor. We ought not to forget that the majority of the workers in the most important industries are foreign-born, that the most exploited and oppressed unskilled laboring masses are foreign-born. The Workers Party has so many foreign-born members, not because it is un-American, but because it is a true image of the composition of the proletariat in American big industry.

It would be no solution if we were to combat national separatism by dissolving the Federations. On the contrary, through the destruction of the Federations we would destroy our only possibility for propaganda capable of reaching the non-English-speaking population.

It is naive utopianism for many comrades to believe that we can bring the foreign-speaking com-

rades nearer to American political life by conducting English language classes. A political party cannot be transformed into a big Berlitz School of Languages, with the English grammar as its political program of action.

What then is the correct method?

We have only two means by which to draw our comrades into American political life. First, political education; second, the political struggle itself.

Political education means that the party must analyze carefully every important political question. It must work out the right political policies, and make them the general possession of the entire party membership. In the last year, our party has already made the first steps in this direction. We have installed a research bureau. We have organized a party press service. And, most important of all, we have published a whole series of leaflets, pamphlets, and books, not about general principles, but about concrete American problems.

Great advance has been made by our party in active participation in the political struggle. All our campaigns — Amalgamation, Labor Party, Defense, Protection of Foreign-Born — mean a common struggle of the foreign-born together with the English-speaking workers, a concrete active fight against the *American* capitalist and against the *American* capitalist government.

It is vital for our party to realize the slogan: *Be American!*

*Be American* means rising from isolated Language Federations to the general points of view of the whole party. *Be American* means to rise above local narrowness and to think on a national scale. *Be American* means to rise above individual bosses or trusts or trades in order to see the whole American ruling class.

*Be American* means not to forget for a moment that the great center of all class struggle is the central committee of all capitalists — the government. We have a strong movement here, which we wish to, and must, support with all our power — the movement for the recognition of the government of Soviet Russia. It is not meant for a joke, but is a very earnest proposal that we should at last start a movement within our party for the recognition of the government of the United States of America.

*Be American* means to struggle against the whole capitalist class of America; it means the hardest struggle against 100 percent nationalism of the jingoes. *Be American* means for the militant Communist to present the claim for the workers' rule of America. *Be American* means for us that the American proletariat has the task to lead and to rule America. The Communist idea shall rule America in the sense in which the great poet Walt Whitman sings concerning the orator:

To inflate the chest — to roll the thunder of the voice  
out from the ribs and throat,

To make the people rage, weep, hate, desire, with yourself,  
To lead America — to quell America with a great tongue.

*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.*

*Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2006. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.*