
Problems of the Party — III: My Party, Right or Wrong, My Party.

by John Pepper

Published in *The Worker* [New York], v. 6, no. 275 (May 19, 1923), pg. 5.

The chief hindrance to the strengthening of the Workers Party is that many members of our party do not feel themselves party members first and foremost. Many party members do not identify themselves 100 percent with the party. They consider their party membership as an obligation, on a par with, but not above other obligations.

The Labor Organizations and Our Party.

The members of the Workers Party are at the same time members of a whole series of other organizations. They are members of various trade unions, they work in the Technical Aid Society, they help along in the work of the Friends of Soviet Russia. They are active in other relief organizations. They lend their aid to the Labor Defense Council. They participate in the various Workmen's Circle and Benefit Societies.

That is, of course, all as it should be. What is more, the Workers Party would not be a Communist Party if its members belonged only to the Workers Party. The only way that a revolutionary party can become a real workers' party and not remain a small sect is for the members to be within the laboring masses; that is, they must be members of all existing labor organizations. The Communists must not remain ordinary members of these various workers' organizations. They must be the heart and soul of these organizations.

But the party members, if they are real Communists, must never forget for a moment that they

are members of the party, and must work as party members in all these unions, in the FSR, Workmen's Circle, Sick and Death Benefit Societies, and other workmen's organizations.

The Workers Party has a policy for shaping the work of its members in all these organizations. The Workers Party as a Communist Party must stand above all the group interests of these various labor organizations, and must evolve a policy for coordination and cooperation among them all. The members of the Workers Party in all these labor organizations must feel themselves representative of their party, and must represent the policy of the party there at all times.

Many members of our party, however, do not understand the primary duty of a Communist, and often act in an opposite sense. It is not a rare phenomenon to find Communists who work in the American Federation of Labor unions in conflict with Communists belonging to independent unions, or to IWW unions. We have seen Communists working in the FSR in conflict with Communists working in other relief organizations. We have seen what is the most flagrant example of this sort of thing — Communists working in the Technical Aid Society declaring that the discipline of the convention of the Technical Aid Society denoted a higher discipline for them than the discipline of the convention and of the Central Executive Committee of the Workers Party.

Communists who act in this way have no idea of the most elementary duties which they owe

to the party.

Interests of Special Groups or of Entire Working Class?

It happens very often that Communists who work in a trade union or in a benefit society consider the special group interest of that particular organization as more important than the interests of their party. We have seen Communists belonging an AF of L trade union fighting against the policy of the party because we are against the independent unions being abandoned, if they are real mass organizations. And on the contrary we have seen Communists belonging to the independent unions fighting against the policy of the Party because we hold that the greatest mass organization of the workers, the AF of L, is necessarily the most important field of activity for Communists.

These Communists who develop an AF of L patriotism are just as much in the wrong as those who have an independent union patriotism. Likewise, those who have become Benefit Society patriots are just as much in the wrong as those who have become Technical Aid patriots. They do not understand that the task of a Communist is not to be one-sided in upholding the interests of one group of workers, but that he must represent the common interests of the working class as a whole.

We have seen Communists working in various relief organizations and believing that only relief activity is important. Instead of representing the policies of the party in these organizations, their aim has been to transform the Workers Party into a large relief organization. We have seen Communists working in the Technical Aid Society growing so one-sided in this work as to forget the interests of the proletarian revolution, forgetting even the real interests of Soviet Russia, in that they wished to allow a wholesale emigration of the entire Workers Party to Soviet Russia. Instead of representing the interests of the Workers Party within the Technical Aid Society, they wished to trans-

form the Workers Party into a great emigration society.

We often see good Communists working in some language federation of the party, who forget the common interests of the party as a whole, and represent one-sidedly the interests of a Finnish, Polish, or Hungarian, German or Jewish group. These comrades must evolve into inhabitants of a national Ghetto, instead of being members of an international Communist Party. We see Communists who otherwise are good comrades working in some local party organization and stressing too one-sidedly the peculiarities of their local organizations, thus forgetting the tasks of the party as a whole. It is absurd for Chicago or New York or any other city to say that the policy of the party is all right, but does not suit Chicago or Detroit. That is not democratic centralism, but a declaration of independence on a local scale.

All these comrades are greatly mistaken, and have no conception of the duties of Communist Party members.

They forget that the Workers Party represents the common interests of the working class as a whole, and that therefore, if they set any group interests above the party interests, they are thereby setting a group interest of the workers above the common interests of the working class as a whole. It is the duty of Communists first of all to be Party patriots, and not AF of L patriots, independent union patriots, or benefit society patriots. It is the duty of Communists always to stand for Communist policies in all labor organizations. It is therefore a mistake for Communists to represent the interests of other organizations within the Communist Party. This does not mean that Communists must be disloyal to their trade unions, relief organizations, or benefit societies. On the contrary, if they represent Communist policies in the various organizations, they will always represent the common and lasting interests of the working class as against the narrow-minded and ephemeral interests of certain groups. And vice versa,

when Communists drag specific trade union or other group interests into the workers Party, they harm the labor movement by hindering the Workers Party from becoming the real champion of the common interests of the whole working class, by degrading the party in turning it into the representative of local, ephemeral, or group interests. A Communist Party must be centralized and disciplined in organization as well as in ideology.

Party Patriotism.

It is possible and even obvious that independent unionists in the party would not always be in agreement with the policy of the party towards the AF of L. It is possible that certain Communists in the Technical Aid Society are not in accord with the policy of the Party towards the emigration question. It is possible that Communists in the various language federations do not always understand the policies of the party as an international party. It is possible that comrades in Chicago do not always and in every instance understand the policies of the party as an organization on a national scale. It is possible that on the underground/overground question, comrades are not in accord with the policy of the overwhelming majority of the party. But all these comrades should not forget that the great historical task of the party is to pursue a policy which coordinates the activities of all comrades working in AF of L unions as well as in independent unions, who are in the Jewish Federation, who struggle in Chicago or New York, who are adherents “in principle” of underground or overground form of or-

ganization.

The party can grow strong only if all comrades, regardless of whether they are in disagreement on individual points of party policy, nevertheless uphold the ideological or organizational discipline of the Party. Zinoviev once said that discipline begins where conviction ends. In a party with tens of thousands of members, with 1200 branches, with 15 Language Federations, with AF of L and independent unionists, covering coast to coast in such a gigantic country as the United States, it is impossible that every member in such a party should possess the same uniform attitude on every question at all times. But it is absurd for Communists having the smallest difference immediately to act on their errors or prejudices, according to their own minds, instead of acting according to the policies decided by the convention and the Executive Committee of the party. Communists must develop just as much patriotism towards their party as capitalists develop patriotism towards their country. The old adage says: “My country, right or wrong, my country.” It means that in face of danger, capitalists defend their country regardless of whether the country which they rule is right or wrong. This should be the attitude of Communists towards their party. In face of danger, we must not forget that a Communist Party is always an army corps surrounded by dangers on all sides — a Communist should not abandon his party, even if he thinks that the party is in the wrong. Every militant Communist should write on his shield: “My Party, right or wrong, my Party!”

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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