

Some Immediate Party Problems

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(*Excerpt of remarks to the meeting of the Central Committee on May 30, 1928.*)

I. THE IMMEDIATE ECONOMIC SITUATION

The Present Depression and Outlook

What is the question before us? It is not a question of whether the outlook at hand is for a future economic crisis. The economic crisis in large measure is here already. The question at issue before us is: What kind of a crisis do we have today? Here we have a fundamental difference of opinion. Is it the final crisis of American capitalism? I even raise the question of whether the present crisis is of as deep-going a character as was the 1921 crisis. I say that it is not such a crisis today. Some might accuse me of hesitation, but I rely on facts. Facts speak louder than unfounded and therefore useless evidence. Is there sufficient proof that we are immediately on the road to a crisis, as severe or more severe than the one in 1921? If there is such evidence, it has not yet been produced.

What are the facts? I say there is an economic crisis. I even indicated three of its new, specific features: the crisis in the very heart of the American capitalist edifice—the crisis of mass production. Then a crisis in the credit situation, and, third, the crisis of unemployment. The question before us is, what kind of a crisis do we have today? A comrade posed the central question as: “Do we expect a recurrence of the 1927 unprecedented prosperity?” That is the key question. Some comrades say categorically “no!” If I have misrepresented them, let them say so now. I say, if any comrades reply categorically “no” to this question, then they maintain that we have already the basic crisis of capitalism in the United States. One cannot say so definitely “no,” and don’t charge me with overhesitation and underestimation when I say that American capitalism may have an economic situation of at least as much prosperity or even a bigger prosperity than that of 1926-1927. If anyone calls embracing of such fallacious conclusions “going to the left,” then he is going to the left on his head, and with his eyes shut. Let us be on solid ground, comrades. We have to

stand on our feet and not on our heads. Our eyes must be wide open. Let us face the facts and realities of the economic situation.

I maintain that there are fundamental elements indicating forces of decay in American capitalism, but the presence of these fundamental forces does not indicate the beginning of a general decline of American imperialism. It is my contention that, though these comrades deny that they say American imperialism is already on the decline, the so-called facts which they give us would compel us to adopt a policy based on their only possible justifiable conclusion, i.e., that American imperialism is already on the decline.

It is a fact that the export of capital, that the growing limitation of the domestic market and the rapid rise of the rentier class are indications of basic forces making for the decline and the disintegration of American imperialism. For the first time in the history of our Party, this was pointed out, in the February thesis. The February thesis is not private vest-pocket property. It is the product and the property of the Party.

What is the economic situation in Great Britain and in Italy? In these countries, capitalism is definitely on the decline. Why? There the whole industrial economy, the whole process of production, industry by industry, tends towards disintegration. These comrades contend that in America, the crisis in the textile, coal, and oil industries is evidence of the beginning of the decline of American capitalism. We say that the crisis in the coal, oil and textile fields in the United States is not a crisis indicating the beginning of the decline of American imperialism, but that these are temporary crises, which will be met by a further extension of rationalization, and thus may indicate even greater growth of American imperialism. This is the fundamental difference between the crisis in the various industries in the United States and of most of the industries in Great Britain and Italy. When we learn to understand this difference, then we shall learn that through such faulty analysis one is bound to develop a whole line which is wrong.

Comrade Dunne, speaking before the Presidium of the Communist International, stated much more clearly what other Comrades have stated somewhat vaguely and confusedly. Comrade Dunne charges the Central Committee of our Party with having underestimated the rapidity of the development of the class-struggle in the United States and having underestimated the tempo of decline in national economy. Let me quote:

"Furthermore, our Party—and in this all of us are involved, but of course most of the responsibility rests on the majority of the Central Committee has underestimated the rapidity of the

development of the class-struggle in America, underestimated the tempo both of the decline of American national economy and the will and desire of the masses to struggle."

This is a network of illusions. There is no basic decline in the American national economy. We have an economic depression—and a severe economic depression. But American national economy, as such, is not declining fundamentally. Quite the contrary. It is on the ascent. Here is the source of the tremendous obstacles and difficulties still in our path. And if one denies these obstacles, then, in the language of some comrades, he will be "dancing quadrilles" of overhesitation and underestimation.

II. SOME POLITICAL PROBLEMS

I. *Is There a General Radicalization of the Working Class Today?*

The total volume of radicalization in the United States is today greater than at any time since the collapse of the LaFollette movement. Charge me with being pessimistic if you please. Labels do not determine contents. Because the total volume of radicalization in the United States is greater today than at any time since the collapse of the LaFollette movement, it does not mean that there is radicalization among the railroad workers, among the unskilled workers in the steel industry, and in the ranks of the unskilled and semi-skilled in other industries.

Let us examine the situation to find a correct answer to the question of "general radicalization." Those Comrades are partly correct who say we should not only compare the objective conditions in the United States with the objective conditions in other countries in order to arrive at a correct estimate of the trend of radicalization in the United States. It is true that this is not the only thing to do, but when one judges radicalization and when one judges Communist tactics, we must also judge them in comparison with objective conditions in the other countries.

It is certainly correct that one must judge relatively the trend of radicalization on the basis of examining various periods in this country. I will take up this yard-stick for measuring and we will see how wrong some comrades are in their conclusion that there is a general radicalization in this country.

Compare the present situation with the period of September, 1924 to May, 1927. The present period shows an increasing tendency towards more wide-spread radicalization. Does that mean that radicalization is general? It means nothing of the kind. Does that mean, as Comrade Dunne said, that the whole working class

is moving to the left? It means nothing of the kind. If the whole working class were being radicalized, we would have some organized mass political expression of the working class. Please find this. You cannot produce it except in your own heads, and the working class is not in the heads of some of our comrades.

It is true that radicalization is more wide-spread than last year. The question is: How widespread is it? Is it widespread enough for a labor party movement? I say it is less widespread than in 1922-23. Our working class is today still less homogeneous than it was in 1922-23. Say that I am moving backwards. Unfortunately, these objectionable facts are true. When one closes his eyes to them, he is not moving forward, but he is blindly moving himself backward. Give us the facts of the general radicalization. Is it widespread enough to make the workers flock in large numbers to our Party? It is true that in the localities where there is radicalization the masses turn to our Party. We have this in the mining industry. The response to our Party in the textile industry is growing. Our numbers in the needle trades are rising. But for a different story, ask the comrades in the steel industry. Ask these unskilled workers, because I do not want anybody to come up here and say that I am basing myself on the labor aristocracy and solely on the members of the trade unions. The unorganized masses, insofar as response to our Party goes, respond only in those industries which are at present in a critical condition, and where radicalization has therefore set in.

Is radicalization widespread enough to manifest itself in a huge strike wave? It is not. In 1922, we had such a strike wave. Then we had also a political expression of radicalization. We want the comrades, before they tell us that there is a general radicalization, to give us some facts. Let me make one point very clear here. It is not a more left position to say that there are more workers moving to the left when there is no such movement noticeable except in your imaginations. The mere fact that you are saying that the workers are moving on a general widespread scale to the left does not by itself make you more left than the comrades who estimate the situation more calmly and correctly. The correct Communist position is that we should adapt our tactics to the objective situation without disregarding the difficulties.

It seems to me, however, that to some comrades it is becoming a crime to define and make clear the difficulties we find. The Communist International, in its last decision, stated that the American party faces tremendous objective difficulties. Was the Com-

munist International pessimistic? I join the Comintern in such "pessimism," which is only Bolshevik realism. In the last C I estimate we find statements regarding gigantic difficulties. How do you dovetail this with the theory of general national radicalization as found by some comrades here who never mentioned the difficulties confronting our Party? That these comrades hold there is general radicalization of the working class in the United States today, is proven by their proposed political strikes for our daily agitation. These comrades are theoreticians. That means they immediately produce a theory for every one of their policies, right or wrong. This policy if adopted by our Party, would bring to the working class no *radicalization*. On the contrary, it would bring to the Party *radical* isolation. This policy we repudiate. This we cannot accept. Let me also emphasize a question touched on by Comrade Pepper in one of his contributions to the *Communist*. It is a very important question which we must not hesitate and must not be too cautious in acknowledging and understanding. It is the question of the relative proportion of strength between the Communist Party and the workers in this country and in other countries. Germany, with a smaller working class than that of the United States, Great Britain, with a smaller working class, Czechoslovakia with a comparatively insignificant working class—compare the Communist parties over there with ours. They are mass parties in a smaller working class. And when one is critical or boastful, he should keep this point in mind, because the Communist International always keeps this in mind in dealing with our Party.

2. *Overhesitation and Underestimation*

One word about overhesitation and underestimation. I think some comrades in our Party are developing a dance mania. Stop this quadrille and stop this hesitation. We are not dancing. We reject improper political dancing. We have a constant correct line, comrades. Some comrades continually ask which is the greater danger in our Party, overhesitation or underestimation. We say both are foreign to correct policy and we fight both resolutely. I demand that the comrades should show, and since they have not shown in the debate, that they be given a special privilege to change their speeches in order to produce the facts to indicate on which important question our Party has hesitated since the last convention.

I will examine the main criticism in a moment. I want to find facts indicating our failure to see the new economic situation. And

these cannot be produced. I say that our February thesis on the economic situation was in the main a contribution which our Party can be proud of. It was not the work of a "fast group" a "slow group" or a "hesitation group." Even the self-styled fastest dancing comrades will grant that I know something about the how and why of the February thesis. And the C I endorses our thesis.

Again I deny emphatically that our Central Committee does not see very clearly and quickly, changes in the objective conditions. We lost no time in seeing the changing conditions of the working class. I deny that our Party did not view correctly so outstanding a change in the American labor movement as is evidenced in the fact that appreciably no trade unions were being organized in a period of prosperity. This is a trend totally distinct from that of the past. But even if we had not seen such changes, the duty of these comrades is not to make it an issue, but to bring it into the Political Committee. It so happens that on these questions, the comrades who complained most against our myopic political vision, saw nothing.

3. *Bourgeoisification as the Father of General Radicalization*

A few words about bourgeoisification.

Capital is being made here of the point made by Comrade Pepper in one of his articles, that it is not necessary for the level of the American workers' standard of living to sink as low as the standard of living in the European countries, for radicalization to set in. It is on a total misunderstanding of this correct statement of Comrade Pepper's that the fathers of the general material bourgeoisification of the day-before-yesterday now ask us to baptize this radicalization baby. No, it can't and won't be done by the Central Committee. The statement put forward by Comrade Pepper was that it is not true that we, in this country, cannot have a mass revolutionary movement until the conditions in the United States sink to the level of Bulgaria, Italy, France, or some of the other capitalist countries. Precisely because the American workers have been used to a higher standard of living, therefore it does not have to go down to so low a level as, for instance, in the Balkans. But comrades, does that mean that it has already gone down sufficiently on the American basis, on the relative position, to give us general radicalization in the United States? No, comrades. Statistical facts, that is what we want. Prove it. We talk a lot about wage cuts. Statistics show that wage cuts are on the increase, but

that the volume of wage cuts has not yet been sufficient to produce a serious upward trend in the number of strikes or a national mass resistance of the working class as a whole to capitalist aggression.

So this mangled baby of radicalization cannot be given to us legitimately as the offspring of the general material bourgeoisification father, despite the nine months that elapsed between the conception of the two.

One comrade raises this question: Is the Party swinging to the right or is it not true that it is swinging to the left, because today we place the greatest emphasis on organization of the unorganized? This is too mechanical an approach. The emphasis which we place on a slogan at any time depends upon the objective conditions. It is not an accident that our Party places a far greater emphasis upon organizing the unorganized than we did in 1922. What was the situation in 1922? In 1922, we correctly emphasized the question of amalgamation. There was then a deep stir in the unions, which still had large numbers of the unskilled and semi-skilled workers, who came into the trade union movement in the war period. We correctly put considerable emphasis at that time on the fight in the existing trade unions. Today our emphasis is, first and above all, on organizing the unorganized, because of new objective factors which we will examine soon. That does not mean that in 1922 we had a right-wing policy and today our policy is for this reason more to the left. In 1922, we were correct in emphasizing one angle. In 1928, we are equally correct in emphasizing another approach.

4. *The Chinese Question*

A few words about China. China manifests another question in which fallacies arise as a result of formulating basic policies on temporary and superficial phenomena. What is the source of danger for an opportunistic line on this question? It is the following: Of course Japan is an imperialist aggressor. If we lay first emphasis at this time on potential conflict between that and American imperialism as the outstanding factor of the immediate situation, we would be guilty of the worst kind of opportunism. It is where the emphasis is put that counts, because the emphasis shows the line. What is the correct position on the Chinese question? It is the fol-

lowing: Japanese imperialism is aggressive, and comes into conflict with the imperialist policies of the United States. But in the face of great danger of a revolutionary China rising at the present, it puts aside its conflicts with Japan for the moment. I say "puts aside" and I can cite official acts of the American State Department to show you that the United States is today the vigorous ally of Japan. This does not mean that Wall Street imperialism is the tail of Nipponese imperialism. When one robber helps another in a hold-up, it does not make a tail out of him.

It is necessary that we should understand clearly that these Japanese-American imperialist conflicts are developing and are bound to sharpen, but particularly because of the strong, persistent anti-Japanese propaganda of American imperialism and the propaganda of Wall Street that the United States is a friend of China—because of these two capitalist maneuvers among the workers, because of these tactics to develop among the workers an anti-Japanese feeling and a ridiculous notion that America is the only friend of China, it is especially necessary to expose the fraud of American imperialist propaganda by making clear the concrete, immediate aggressive role of American imperialism jointly with Japan against China. I refer you to the official statement issued by Kellogg with a declaration that the reports to the effect that the United States criticized Japan for its Manchuria and Shantung policy are incorrect. This is an official declaration issued last Friday by the State Department. I can cite you a number of others. There are available statements of the bourgeois press which indicate the same policy.

Does this mean nothing to you? American imperialism is today temporarily giving Japan, to a certain extent, a free hand because of the greater danger of revolutionary China, because of certain concessions and deals which we know nothing about. Do we deny the sources of conflict between Japanese and American imperialism? Do we deny the struggle in the Pacific? Nonsense. Don't let's waste our breath on that. What we do deny is that our business there can be to hide the role of American imperialism in this connection as an active co-operation with Japan in crushing China. The basic line of the policy of the Party must be founded not on differences among the imperialist powers, but on the basis of the concrete imperialist role of the so-called home government, of the United States government, under whose domination we live. This

is a fundamental point, the essence of Leninism. If one departs from this, he departs from one of our fundamental tenets that can and will lead only to the detriment of the Policy as a whole. We always place in the foreground the fact that it is the duty of the working class in a particular country in the struggle against imperialism, to fight first and foremost against the imperialism under whose domination it lives.

5. *The Labor Party*

One comrade has worked overtime to make a contribution to the Labor Party policy of the Party. I think he did, but we should reject his contribution. When we use terms, we must first understand them clearly. This comrade really raised the whole question of the Labor Party in a very clear and categorical way. He asks: Is it our duty to work for a Labor Party today? We say "yes." This is our answer unhesitatingly. But why does not the comrade answer this question himself? What is his theory? The trade unions today are the least favorable base for a Labor Party, he emphasizes. But he forgets the CEC resolution which he proposed and the policy of the CEC takes that into consideration. He says that the unskilled masses are not in the trade unions. They are unorganized. He then winds himself into more questions without answering them. He raises the question: Shall we accept individual membership as the basis for the Labor Party? Or shall we organize on the basis of clubs as proposed by another comrade? I think the Labor Party line laid down by the CEC is correct. The answers to these questions given in the resolution we proposed are correct. The policy of the Political Committee has been correct.

6. *The Pennsylvania Labor Party Tactics*

The Political Committee correctly decided that it is necessary for us to raise the question and fight for the endorsement of Workers Party candidates in all labor organizations. The question at issue in this case was the *time*. The question is one of occasion in view of several other factors characterizing the immediate objective circumstances. The question here was one of tactics. Here is where I admit a major tactical error was made by the Central Committee's representative in the Pennsylvania Labor Party convention deliberations, and decisions relative to the immediate endorsement of our national candidates even before they

had been nominated by our Party. The proof of it is that we had armed the fakers to strike us under conditions in which they should not have been able to come near us.

III. THE TRADE UNION QUESTION

What is the key to our present trade-union question? The key is not to be found in a discussion of dual unionism, its merits or its demerits. We must repudiate the loose use of the term dual unionism as tending to confuse rather than clarify the situation. The term "new union", "organization of the unorganized," is much more fit. In discussing this question, you must keep in mind the following new objective facts characterizing the present situation. These are:

1. The tendency to wipe out the skill lines.
2. The A. F. of L. bureaucracy continues to refuse and actually hinders and sabotages all efforts to organize the unorganized.
3. Therefore, the A. F. of L. is becoming more and more an organization of the skilled workers, or the labor aristocracy.
4. The collapse of the United Mine Workers of America.

These four points are the primary forces making for a decisive marked shifting in our center of gravity in the trade-union work. It is therefore to be noted only that our center of gravity and emphasis is shifting through the concentration of our energy and efforts on the organization of the unorganized.

What about our work in the trade unions? I think some comrades would formulate their attitude towards work in the trade unions a little more carefully if they were to write it. Our work in the existing trade unions does not take a backward step. We do not in the least drop the slogan of our party "Into the Trade Unions." The work in the existing trade unions, because of the great stress we are now laying on the organization of the unorganized, assumes even greater importance than it had before. Why? Because in order to be as efficient, as effective, as successful as possible in our organization of the unorganized, we must utilize to the fullest extent and degree whatever resources we have in the existing trade unions. In this light I think that the article in the *British Worker* of April 13 was a slander against our Party, was a villification of our Party and should be repudiated. It places

the question before us as one of either here in the existing trade unions or there in the dual unions. The question is not either here or there. The question is both, and which comes first, which is the most emphatic. The Central Committee has answered firmly that today, because of the objective situation, the emphasis on the organization of the unorganized comes first.

I do not agree with certain sections of the Trade Union resolution. I agree only with the general line of the document. I think the formulation of the criticism of the Party in reference to its role in the building of the TUEL is not correctly formulated. I think it is wrong to state that the party is neglecting the railroad industry. It would be better to emphasize the difficulties of the Party in the railroad industry and show our weaknesses there. On several other points, the resolution should be corrected and improved.

In his article, Comrade Pepper was not correct in my opinion, when he said that Comrade Losovsky's resolution of the Profintern on the American question was ninety-nine percent correct and one percent wrong. What is the criticism we have made? We are all agreed on the primary criticism. It is a lack of analysis of the present situation in the labor movement that we complain of most. Such a little thing in a Communist resolution! Comrade Pepper cannot be classified as an expert on percentages in Profintern resolutions when he says that the complete absence of an economic analysis is only one percent.

There are two kinds of errors—errors of commission and errors of omission. Sometimes omission is more dangerous because it becomes a source of a whole family or a whole series of errors of commission. Comrade Losovsky is wrong when he gives us a line for the American Party without giving us an analysis of the American labor movement. I say our delegation should be criticized for ever accepting the resolution without analysis of the objective situation. It is precisely because of this lack that Comrade Losovsky has a "quadrille" orientation.

Certain criticism that has been made deserves special characterization. When we read some of the off-shoots of Comrade Losovsky's criticism as written by Comrade Villenkin, we say that it is not a quadrille orientation, it is a St. Vitus dance.

A second error: This is the inadequate recognition of the achievements and the results secured by the American Party in the organization of the unorganized. No party in the C I, having our inadequate resources and insufficient forces, has made as much effort as we have and gotten as good results in organizing the unorganized.

Take the campaign in the mining industry. Compare this work with the activities of much bigger Communist parties in their miners union. We can certainly be very proud of our mining campaign. What mystifies me is that all of a sudden the Colorado situation becomes a major error of the Party in the minds of some comrades. "We should have been more active" "We should have responded more quickly." This will hold true for any situation. But, comrades, why not drop the practice of always forgetting to take into account or even to mention casually, such little considerations as the inadequate Party resources? Why forget to mention the I. W. W. treachery and why forget to mention the fact that the Political Committee rejected the wrong line of some Comrades on Colorado and rejected it unanimously? These little omissions should not give you the costly privilege of committing the serious error of forgetting to tell us about the substantial results we achieved in Colorado for the Party.

A Comrade raises the question why there were no unions organized in West Virginia in 1926 and 1927. There are several reasons for it. We have had committees but no local unions. Let no one deny that it is a fatal error that the Party has not done more to stimulate the organization of local unions with membership cards on a regular basis. The Polbureau has made a decision to this effect quite a number of weeks ago.

Let us look into the matter chronologically. In 1926 and 1927 the situation in the United Mine Workers was a little different from what it is today. Before the fourteen-months strike, our Party and the left wing were so "strong" that at the Indianapolis convention in 1927 we could muster about twenty left-wing delegates into our caucus and we had to enter the convention from the roof down and the cellar up. So the situation in the UMW of A was a little different then. Was our policy wrong at that time? But the proof of such accusations is not to be found in the fact that no regular new unions were organized. The proof of the accusation to the extent of its very limited truth is to be found in other mistakes made by the Party. One of these mistakes, however, is not the alleged mistake mentioned. This comrade also states that the Central Committee was opposed to calling a national left-wing conference in the miners union in early 1927. This is correct. We were opposed to calling one in May, 1927. To attempt to call the conference at that time without added preparations would have been, not a left position, but an insane one. The CEC adopted a correct policy in endorsing the idea that the holding of a left-wing conference and declaring for immediate agitation in the organization

was part of the preparations for holding such a conference successfully. To have issued a call without proper preparations would have been incorrect. We stand for our old position on the basis of the above facts.

Is there any value in Comrade Losovsky's line? Of course there is some, but I am convinced that there is plenty of harm in it. It puts us in danger of our weaker and more confused comrades leaving the trade unions.

We are of the opinion that we must not reject the idea of working in the unions. Its continuation does not conflict with the work in new unions. Quite the contrary, it serves to supplement and help it.

I do not think there is any danger of our Party over-emphasizing the importance of working in the trade unions. At least not for some time to come. We must be on guard against the emphasis on organizing the unorganized becoming a force for inspiring our comrades with a desire to leave the existing unions. As it is we have too small a proportion of our Party membership within the existing trade unions. To us, there is absolutely no contradiction involved in staying in the old unions and organizing the unorganized. In fact, they are inseparable. For example, if we examine the role of our party in the needle trades, the miners, the textile workers, we will see the importance of previous trade-union training and experience.

The Save-the-Union slogan has been somewhat clarified in the recent discussions. The general line laid down for it in the resolution proposed by Comrade Foster is a correct one. It is altogether different from the attempt made to use the Save-the-Union slogan mechanically and as a slogan for the entire labor movement. This the CEC rejected even before the February Plenum, in consideration of resolutions on the trade-union question. We use the Save-the-Union slogan only when we can mobilize masses for a struggle against the forces of reaction and in no other case.