
J.P. Cannon Meeting at Pittsburgh

[event of March 27, 1921]

by Pittsburg SDO "Ryan"

Unsigned report quoted in full in an April 16, 1921 report of BoI Special Agent Michael Yankovich, DoJ/BoI Investigative Files, NARA collection M-1085, reel 917, file 186701-136-3. Author was clearly the BoI's informant "Ryan," the UCP's Pittsburgh Sub-District Organizer who contributed extensive reports on the UCP in 1921.

I arrived at the International Socialist Lyceum at 1:30 pm today [March 27, 1921] and found Frank Randa, Paul Hanas, the Croatian secretary of the Defense Committee (of the UCP for this district) and the organizer from Millvale and Etna whose name is Leyien.

I was informed by Randa that a telegram had been received by him from Organizer Flynn [Edward Lindgren] in New York stating that Chas. Ashleigh would be able to come here, as he had a conflicting date near New York, and that J.P. Cannon would speak on the same subject instead of Ashleigh. I was then introduced to Cannon, who is about 37 years old, blue eyes, weighs about 175 lbs., and is about 5'8" tall, light hair and has the right thumb missing, and is an American.

Cannon asked me what class of people he would be speaking to, and I informed him that they have followed the radical movement for some time. He then said that he desired to hold an Open Forum in the evening, provided enough persons could attend.

At 3:00 pm a crowd of about 75 persons had assembled in the second floor hall, and I introduced the speaker.

Cannon stated that the Amsterdam International was an assembly of the reactionary trade unions of Europe, and the purpose for creating an Amsterdam International arose out of the radical element in the European Unions, who demanded and affiliation with the Moscow International, but the reactionary leaders, who were agents of the Capitalist Class, demanded that an International be formed that was reactionary in itself.

He pointed out that the radical element demanded that the trade unions affiliate with the Moscow International, so that when this "Yellow" International was formed, it seemed a radical step to some of these unionists, and they were satisfied, and the leaders accomplished their purpose of misleading the workers of Europe, for by affiliating with the Amsterdam International nothing was gained.

He then compared the conditions in this country with those of Europe, stating that if an International was proposed here that was as strong as the one of Amsterdam in radical tendencies, Gompers would fight it with all the power that he commands, as it would be far too radical for the conservative Gompers.

He then referred to the misleadership of Gompers, in the way he deceives the membership of the AF of L by acting in direct accord with the wishes of the Capitalist Class of this country.

In conclusion he appealed to the workers present to agitate in their trade unions for affiliation with the Moscow International, and if they are not members of any union yet, to join one at once so that they can start this agitation. He urged the radicals that are present members of unions to form shop groups, for the purpose of this same agitation.

A vote was taken to determine the consent of those present in regard to holding an Open Forum this evening, with a talk on "The Need for an Active Political Party" by Cannon. A meeting was agreed upon to be held at 8:00 pm.

The collection for the afternoon meeting was \$21.50.

Evening Meeting.

The meeting this evening was attended by 35 persons, and was called to order at 8:30 pm and Cannon spoke until 9:15 pm on the need for a political party that is active, and then he answered questions until 10:10 pm.

His talk was directed mainly to the members of the IWW that were present tonight, and he showed them that a political party is necessary because the IWW could not successfully take over the industries and operate them without a "Dictatorship of the Proletariat," or a workers' government.

The main objection to the Communists on the part of the minority in the IWW was due to their opposition to the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" and he pointed out that no matter what the IWW

members call it, as long as it is a workers' government that the IWW establishes if they are successful in the taking over of the industries, they establish a "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" whether they call it that or not.

He then referred to the method of organization that was employed in some cases by the IWW in the harvest fields. It was a method of coercion, and he pointed out that in order to maintain the revolutionary standards that the IWW started out with it is necessary for the leaders of the IWW to form themselves into a true revolutionary group within the IWW for the purpose of maintaining those standards. Without this group the IWW would become less revolutionary, due to the influx of new members that are not as revolutionary as the old ones.

He pointed out that this is the purpose of the Communists to form revolutionary groups within the unions, and to keep them revolutionary, so that when the time for action comes these communists are prepared to take the lead.

He then cited Russia for example, showing that the 600,000 Communists that are in Russia are the dominating party in Russia because they are Scientific Revolutionists, and they are always at the front in action showing the rest of the people how to act, whether it is at the front in war, or at the front in the reconstructive measures of the country.

In conclusion he stated that the purpose of the Communists here is to form revolutionary groups within the Industrial or the Trade unions, for the purpose of keeping them revolutionary and to lead the way when the time of revolution arrives.

One question that was asked was about the policy of the IWW in using force to secure members, and the answer was that the speaker could not recall any such action.

It was asked how delegates are sent to the World Congress of Labor Unions. The answer was that one delegate is allowed for each 75,000 members of a trade union in this country.

It was asked why the Communists believe the IWW will come to them, instead of the Communists coming to the IWW. That answer was that the Communists work within the IWW and eventually as the result of this working within, the membership of the IWW will come to the Communists.

Anna Goldenberg entered into a lengthy discussion in the defense of the IWW, declaring that the Communists are trying to organize

outside the industries, and that their efforts will be futile in carrying out a revolution when the time arrives, as they do not control the point of production.

The answer was that the Communists are not an outside organization, but that they function within the labor organizations so that when the time for action arrives, they can successfully direct the revolution.

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 pm.

The collection amounted to \$7.27.

Former Organizer Schmitt of the United Communist Party explained to me that he would join the Party again, only for the nervous condition of his wife, and that she is so highly excitable he does not like to rejoin, as she is opposed to it. He stated that he is willing to assist the Party in any way possible, such as acting as the Chairman at meetings, etc., and the distribution of literature.

He asked for copies of the official organ of the Party and he insisted that I secure them for him, so that I was obliged to sell him 4 copies of *The Communist* issue #14. He claims that he in turn will see that those copies will reach persons that are deeply interested in Communism.

I also gave Best a copy of this paper, and gave one to Erbach[?].

J.P. Cannon left tonight on the 11:15 train for New York City. In the way back from the depot, Randa informed Hanas and I that Ed Pretzhold[?] is seen about [Jake] Margolis' office in the day time, in company with [Fred] Biedenkapp and Walsh of the IWW.

Cannon informed me that he wished he could remain in this city for some time, as he would like to convert Margolis to Communism. He also informed me that it is the wish of the Party to send an organizer here for about 2 months to assist me in the forming of a strong English group here.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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