
The Foreign Language Federations in the Socialist Party:

What Should the Relation Be Between Non-English Speaking Groups and the American Workers?

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What should the relation be between the Socialist Party and its foreign language federations? Now that the federations were suspended last May are in a new party [the CPA], spurning even the name of Socialist, the question is not solved. Should the workers speaking other languages than English be enlisted in the Socialist Party or not?

This question is discussed here by Andrew Pranspill, now secretary of Local Astoria [NY] of the party, and formerly National Secretary of the Estonian Federation.

The Foreign Federations.

The action of the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party in suspending the 7 language federations for the violations of the party constitution has presented the Socialist movement in America a momentous problem that must find its solution, or the movement as a whole will suffer. Even if we take for granted that the NEC was formally right, it is apparent that this decision in itself does not solve the problem, it merely brings it to our attention with a greater emphasis. On the other hand, readmittance would also leave the problem unsolved.

For there are deep and substantial reasons why the foreign federations cannot agree with the

platform and the tactics of the Socialist Party. The main reason is the condition that the language federations represent people who are physically in America, but mentally in Europe.

Let us consider the Russian Socialists, for instance. During the last year or two their organizations have grown very rapidly. It is a fallacy to assume that the economic conditions in America or the understanding that Socialism is at the present moment the need of the hour has brought them into the Socialist movement.

They have joined the Socialist Party because they want to go back to their old country. "The workers in Russia have overpowered the capitalists and all the exploiters, and in the struggle they have not spared their lives.... What will you say on your return when the Russian comrades ask you 'What good did you do in America?'"

These are the arguments one almost invariably hears at the Russian propaganda meetings. The reason they so eagerly flock to the Socialist Party is their desire to go back to Russia. The Socialist Party in America will never be able to talk enough about Russia to suit them, for they have very little that interests them at the present moment except Russia.

Take their publications and you will immediately see the amount of space they devote to their old country. Often, most vital occurrences in the

Socialist movement in America pass unnoticed, while some little incidents in their old country get all the publicity possible. It is quite natural and there is nothing to condemn. It couldn't be otherwise.

They talk about the Socialist movement in Europe, but their talk here has no effect of the settling of the problems there. It is a mere arguing and passing of judgment on what the others are doing. And when they talk or write about America their criticisms do not produce more results here than in Europe. The American capitalist government under the circumstances let their condemnations pass unnoticed. As a consequence, they hand in air without a solid basis of action either in Europe or in America. As a result they get used to irresponsible phrases. There is nobody to criticize their criticisms.

The foreign workers and their representative leaders have some grievances that the American workers do not have. We know that the average American looks down on the foreign worker with a certain degree of contempt.

But the foreign Socialist has greater contempt for the American comrade. He is not revolutionary enough for him. As much as they have different grievances, and as they are the products of different historical and economic conditions, their demands are somewhat different, and they put them forward in a different manner.

No wonder the foreign language groups are wording their manifesto in a language foreign to the Socialists in America.

The American workers are born citizens; the foreign workers, however, have to spend about \$25 for their citizen papers. They suffer more severely under the capitalist exploitation than the American born workers. And the Socialist Party for them is altogether a different institution than it is to the American worker. For him the party takes the place of many other social functions. For the foreigners there is hardly any other social gathering outside the party meetings and social gatherings.

It is different with the Americans.

Their leaders are in a peculiar position, in a position that naturally makes them inimical to the Socialist Party. Many of them, veterans in the labor movement, soon realize their narrow field of action in a language federation. Handicapped by the difficulties of language, they find it hard to win over the English listening audiences. They often look funny when they wish to be serious. Men of smaller caliber often take advantage of them merely by their more flexible tongue.

We hear so much about the common basis of action. What common platform will be able to suit two groups of workers, one of which seeks to come to power by exercising its duties of citizens, while the other regards becoming an American citizen almost as a crime? Most of the foreigners who are so anxious of adopting a more revolutionary platform do not want to become citizens.

Presently the foreign federations are numerically stronger than the Socialist Party itself. Does our constitution give them that much power as they represent in numerical strength of membership? Surely not.

These federation have a right to send their fraternal delegate to the national convention, and they have voice but no vote. Thus at the most important party gathering the language federations as such do not count. The federations have their Translator-Secretaries, who are to serve as the medium between the party and the federations. The implication is, of course, that party is over the federation.

The relation seems to be somewhat similar to that of a boss and his hand. But the fact is that the federation is not one rank lower than the party, but its equal. And it should be treated as such.

All the federations carry on their own propaganda with their own means. The party gives them nothing concrete as a help in their struggle.

Why should then the federations pay dues to the party for merely supervising their work? They need no supervision. To do that is an insult

to them. This state of affairs naturally breeds discord and dissatisfaction.

The Socialist Party in America should stand on its own feet. It should not have any foreign federations inside of itself. For these federations are an organization within an organization, even if they formally agree to abide by the constitution and platform of the Socialist Party.

It is a condition detrimental to both the party and to the federations. The best thing to do is to leave them alone. Let them have their platform if they wish, and let them do whatever they please.

No matter how revolutionary the foreign federations may be, no matter how perfect their organization, the American workers will not be led by the foreign federation. The Socialist Party must represent the workers in America, not some homesick immigrants. It must speak to the American workers in the terms of their grievances.

The Socialist Party and the foreign federations have both their respective fields of action. Let each tackle its own problems.

The federations in the party are nothing but a nationalistic split. They make the party a seven-headed monster, with each head thinking differently. Above all our task should be to suit our tactics to the local conditions.

To follow the European Socialists in all the details is tantamount to going to the American battlefield with the charts and topographical knowledge of old Europe.

That this mode of action will lead us into some great American swamp that we have not got on the map of Europe is natural. Let us not be so blind to our immediate surroundings.

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