

We have reached a stage in our development where almost everyone realizes that we cannot go on in the old way. This stage is summed up by the optimistic reports that "we have hundreds of Labor Action readers and dozens of enthusiastic supporters" followed with the pessimistic rejoinder "but we cannot recruit."

We have pushed the circulation of the paper up to 40,000 while our membership has remained practically stationary. What is the meaning of this? Does this not alone shriek out loud that we have run into an impasse that can only be resolved by a consciously planned and directed turn?

This becomes all the more serious when we consider two additional factors. One, that the political situation is extremely favorable to us. Our program is in the most literal sense the expression of the hopes and yearnings of the workers today, while our enemies, both the Stalinists and labor bureaucrats, are forced to show their true role as never before. Two, the war has entered its revolutionary period, the new 1917-23. America will shortly be the great battleground between the forces of fascism and labor. Only we hold the key to labor's victory. But the door will never be unlocked by a party of a few hundreds. We need the thousands. That we don't have them today is not critical. The seriousness arises from the fact that we show no signs of getting them.

The historic responsibility is great. But the opportunity before us is equally great. It depends upon us whether the challenge is accepted and the task fulfilled.

We shall surely fail if we approach this task with the pessimism, the dimmed-vision, the lack of sweeping imagination, the satisfaction with crumbs when loaves are available, the routinism, the conservative traditionalism, the "we are lucky to exist at all" spirit, which is born out of a decade or more of life in a movement with a numerically stationary membership.

This spirit is characterized at present by the limited scope within which our pressing need to recruit is being discussed. The discussion revolves around tactical methods when new strategic concepts are the crying need. The question, "Why don't we recruit" is answered with analyses of how to speak to contacts, with urgings to be more "recruiting-conscious", and with suggestions on how to draw contacts into political, rather than trade union, discussions. This is typical of our "grubbing along" approach.

Our analysis of the question "why don't we recruit" must begin with questions like "What kind of organization do we have today? Can our average worker-reader be brought into it? Can we hold him? If not, what is wrong? In what direction must we change? How do we begin?"

1. The Kind of Party We Have Today

We have the kind of party today that was absolutely necessary to do a certain, indispensable job.

This job consisted of:

- (1) Hammering out a political program to answer the great problems of our epoch; the decline of capitalism, imperialist war, fascism, and the struggle for power.
- (2) Propaganda to spread these theories among the politically advanced workers to gather them under our banner.
- (3) The training and education of a cadre of professional revolutionists to form the backbone of the mass workers party of the future.
- (4) Establishing the mass contacts necessary to lay the foundation for the mass workers party.

We, as a movement, have been at these tasks ever since the emergence of the original Trotskyist nucleus from the Communist Party. Whether we have fulfilled them as well as was possible only history will tell. What is important is that we cannot go back to do them over. We have lived through a period of our movement. We must be able to recognize when it draws to a close. Nature would not leave unpunished the cow that persisted in re-chewing old cud when new pastures have opened up. History, likewise, will not leave unpunished the movement that keeps at old tasks when new ones present themselves.

We have our basic program; the program of the Fourth International, the analysis of Russia as bureaucratic collectivism, and a transitional program as applied to current American problems in the platform of the WP. We cannot remain in the programmatic stage until we have solved every problem of Marxism. A final word is not necessary on accumulation of capital, dialectical materialism, Palestine, the national question, and other problems of greater and lesser importance before we turn our face to fundamental organizational turns.

We have long existed as a propaganda group carrying our basic ideas to the advanced workers. The early "Militant" in the Stalinist circles, the "Appeal" in the Socialist Party circles, and in the united SWP period in advanced workers circles generally, we have sought to find the human material that could be educated to our ideas and drawn into our vanguard.

We have educated and trained a cadre of professional revolutionists; i.e., people who are completely at the disposal of the party, who act as disciplined political soldiers, who make the movement their first interest in life, above occupation, family, or personal affairs. Without such a cadre as a backbone, no revolutionary mass party can be built. It is useless to argue that ours could be of a better composition, more mature, of more proletarian origin, etc. We have what we have. It is impossible to re-make it.

We have, in the recent period, established the mass contacts that form the foundation for a mass workers party. Forty thousand readers of a revolutionary weekly, several thousand subscribers,

hundreds of trade union militants who work with our members in unions, this is the human material that must be organized into the mass workers party.

But why don't we recruit? Because the organization that did a good job on the above tasks is not suited to recruit and assimilate the thousands of workers who agree with our political program. We do not have the kind of a party that can do it. The change from a highly disciplined, close-knit cadre party to a mass workers party is not a matter of adding on in numbers. It is not a gradual process. It has a dialectical development of its own. This must be understood. The understanding must be followed with careful planning to make the transition.

A cadre of professional revolutionists as we are today is of necessity composed of very unusual people. (As viewed from the bourgeois world, "abnormal people"). In a sense, we live a life apart from our surroundings. We develop our own sense of values, our own moral concepts, our own habits, and even our own jargon. We live for the movement. Our training is in the tradition of the Jesuits. Money, position in life, family, personal inclinations as to kind of work, place of work, place of residence, most all yield when necessary to the requirements of the party. Nor should it be different in the leading staff of the revolution. Those who take upon themselves the responsibility of leadership in the struggle for the new society must forsake any stakes in the present one. Only people of this calibre -- the professional revolutionists -- can lead a mass workers party if it is to fulfill its revolutionary role. But we can no more expect that the ranks will be composed of such highly qualified people than the Army could expect to put every soldier through a West Point training.

It is not too difficult to understand why a cadre party like ours should have a composition such as it does. Our membership is characterized by the predominance of young people, either single or childless couples, the large numbers who have had previous political experience, the intellectually-inclined types, the college graduates, the few members from working class families, the large Jewish composition, the fact that we are a "New York movement", etc (It may be of interest here to point out that Lenin's "Iskra" organization was little different in composition.) Out of such a heterogeneous, white collar and petty bourgeois material we have hammered out a cadre organization in many ways remarkable in the history of the revolutionary movement. This process of "hammering" the cadres into final shape took place in the last three years in our Workers Party.

Our cadres were assembled in the struggle against Cannon's bureaucratic conservatism which could neither build a decent cadre organization nor build a mass party. Our forces came primarily from the youth movement or the graduates of the youth movement. They brought with them a vast experience and training as cadre material, in which respect the Y.P.S.L. always excelled the SWP. It was really out of a clash between the cadre-type of organization in the party that the bad party-youth relations of the period arose. Like-

wise, the youth's instinctive rebellion against Cannon's bureaucratic conservatism brought them over to the Minority leadership in the party when it also bound itself in open rebellion against the Cannon procedure.

The type of fighting, activist, highly-disciplined, sacrificing spirit that prevailed in the youth was to become the hallmark of the W.P. We carried out the old youth slogan "Into the streets" in the form of our spirited election campaigns, anti-McWilliams actions, sharecroppers fight, etc. We continued the youth's experiments with a mass, agitational paper and developed our excellent "Labor Action". We established a routine of disciplined assignments for our members and cut out the "deadwood" which still characterizes the SWP. We took over the youth's financial system and applied it to an extent that would have been regarded as madness in the Cannon party. We developed the art of agitation through leaflets and penny pamphlets that made it possible to break down our highly complex programmatic views into popular slogans.

This highly concentrated activity began to show results in mass influence. We started to lay the groundwork for a mass workers party, the final task for our propaganda cadres. Beginning in the spring of 1941 we began to enter industry. Beginning in a trickle and soon reaching a steady stream our people began moving into factories. After the expected initial errors, our young cadres quickly acclimated themselves to work in the mass organizations. In this short space of time we were transformed from an isolated group with a heterogeneous composition into one with trade union ties in all directions, several important concentrations, and almost a solidly industrial membership.

It is incorrect to assume that this happened automatically as a result of the war. It was, of course, stimulated by the war. But why is not the Socialist Party membership in the factories if it automatically followed from the war? Or, more pertinent, why did we so outstrip the much-vaunted proletariat party of Cannon in penetrating industry?

The answer is to be found in the type of membership we developed; our high degree of discipline, self-sacrifice, and activism, based upon young and mobile cadres.

This permitted us to carry out measures beyond anything attempted in the past of the movement. Not only did we uproot people from their occupations and send them into the factories, we uprooted whole groups of people who were sent as "colonists" to California, Detroit, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Chicago.

The old New York Y.P.S.L. was to inject its spirit and training into party work in auto plants and shipyards from coast to coast. Compare this, for example, with Cannon's boast about his "field workers". (At the time of the split, Goldman said contemptuously, "You can take the youth, give us Minneapolis and Indiana Harbor." I am sure we got the better of the bargain.)

The heavy financial contributions made possible the 40,000 weekly copies of Labor Action and the disciplined procedure made possible the

distributions and house-to-house work that brought us the thousands of subscribers. Our disciplined work in trade unions brought us the hundreds of union militants who work with us in progressive groups.

Our cadre party has made maximum use of our human and material resources to conduct a mass agitation. But the type of organization necessary to extract this from our members is, in turn, incapable of reaping the harvest of our work. For this we must begin changing our concept of the party.

I sought to deal with this problem in a groping fashion in my document on Socialist agitation in June, 1942 (distributed at Cleveland conference). My starting point was the need to recruit. Under the conditions then prevailing, I saw it was a problem of making young workers into idealists who caught our vision of a new world and would throw in their lot with a party like ours. I proceeded from the concept that the average worker who read LA was not material for our type of party. It later became apparent that the majority of our leading people didn't comprehend the point of my document. Their advice was "Why don't you write something on Socialism", but no discussion was provoked on how our type of party would grow. My experiences in the field since then have convinced me that my approach was incorrect. Rather than limit our recruiting to young Socialist idealists ready to join a cadre party our real task was to transform our party into a mass workers party that could recruit and hold the average trade union militant who read LA and agreed with its program. This task can no longer be postponed without paying a heavy price for our failure to see the next step.

II. What is a Mass Workers Party?

A mass workers party must not be thought of in terms of numbers alone, although that is one of its features. The question of numerical strength is relative. For instance, we stand closer to the formation of a mass workers party today than did the united SWP with twice the members we have in the WP.

The decisive characteristic of a mass workers party is that it:

- (1) agitates in the widest strata of the working class on question affecting their daily lives,
- (2) gives leadership to groups of workers in the mass organization and the class struggle generally who are influenced by the press and agitators of the party, and
- (3) recruits from these groups of workers the politically awakened militants who become the dominant strata of the party.

We have made part of the turn already. We do agitate in the widest strata of the class, in contrast to our old concentration upon advanced political elements. We do give leadership to groups of workers drawn around our people in industry. But we do NOT recruit them into our party. It is only the last aspect of the mass workers party that we must achieve. But it is the decisive one. And again, it is the most difficult one.

A mass party is a series of ever larger concentric rings radiating out from the heart of the party. At the core is the back-bone of the party, the professional revolutionists. Then there are the worker-members who carry out the party's tasks in shops and streets. Then there are the circles of progressive unionists and others influenced by the party. Then a still more removed circle who are drawn into campaigns, special organizations, defense fights, etc. instituted by the party. And still wider circles who are influenced by the party's ideas and slogans without consciously following the party, etc. Recruitment in such a party takes place by what Dies correctly called "transmission belts". The worker passes along from circle to circle as his class education progresses until he joins the party.

What do we have? We have the anomaly of a core of hardened, professional revolutionists who form the party itself, then nothing and again nothing until we reach the readers of LA (80 times as many as we have party members!). The task of taking a reader of our press from this thrice removed distance directly into a party of professional revolutionists is practically impossible except for the isolated individuals who are made of the stuff and are in the personal circumstances where they can be molded into a "professional".

No other party, to my knowledge, has ever experienced such a tremendous gap between the party membership and the readers of its press. (Perhaps the Dutch SAP and the POUM, though I am not familiar enough with their organizations to say for sure).

Nor is there any prospect at present that we will drift or blunder into a different situation. Workers do not enter our ranks in any numbers nor do we even hold most of those who are recruited. We continue to be a cadre organization with "party people in the party". And as time goes on the number of our worker-supporters grows while the membership remains static. The rate of growth of our far removed outer circle exceeds the growth of the center.

What is the problem of our comrades in the shop who have close political supporters, subscribers to the paper, and fighters for our line in the union? The problem arises; Will he fit into our type of branch? Will he feel at home? Will he accept assignments in addition to giving up one night a week for a branch meeting? Now will he respond to our financial system? So what does our average comrade report? "He is a good union man, a red-hot Labor Actionist, but not party material."

Just what is "party material"? Why should not at least a thousand of our subscribers join the party in the next six months? Don't they agree with our politics? Don't they talk Labor Action ideas? Aren't they ready to carry out our policies in the unions? Then why do they stay out? Have they doubts on the dialectic? Or perhaps do they wait until they can study "Anti-Duhring"?

No. What our comrade means by these militants not being party material is that they are not yet ready, like the Jesuits, to forsake all and follow the party. They have a family. They have economic responsibilities. Their wife (or husband) may be very reactionary. The union already takes up much of their time. They would certainly

not be the type of member we now have. They would not meet our standards.

But then how will we build the mass workers party? Where will we find the human material? Can we ever hope to build without exactly these union militants? Who made up the rank and file of the Bolshevik Party in 1911-14 and from 1917 on? Who made up the hundreds of thousands of members of the Communist Party of Germany? Certainly not Cannon's "foot-loose rebels". These parties were built of exactly the types we daily work with in progressive union groups, the types who subscribe to Labor Action and recommend the paper to their neighbors. Without them there will be no mass party and no revolution.

Though we have never in the past thought this problem through, we have instinctively followed the correct course when it confronted us in its most bald form. What if Coolidge had come back from Southeast with the report that our people there were not ready for a party branch, that they had not read Lenin on organization, that they were family men occupied with making a living and could not give much time to activity? (Maybe some of our people would have concluded this. If so we are fortunate in our choice of organizer for that job.)

We have a branch in Streater. By formal standards it is not much of a branch. It does not operate the way other branches do. But who would say it is not a regular branch of our organization? It distributes the paper, it agitates, it makes the party known among workers. With better direction it would be far more successful and grow. But the people there are party members and well deserved of the distinction.

What if our subscribers in Sierraville want to organize a branch. What kind of branch would it be? Would we judge it by New York standards? Why not? Because workers there are less intelligent than New York workers? No. But we would understand their background, their local conditions, their experiences and we would know they would constitute a certain type of branch.

But is the average worker we meet in New York or Chicago or San Pedro so vastly different from a Sierraville sawmill worker that we would expect him to "forsake all" and place himself at the disposal of the party? that he would take a serious cut in his living standards to meet party taxes, that he would give three nights to the party, and be ready to go to some distant city as a "colonizer" at the word of the party?

We had a certain type of branch in St. Louis ever since the split from the S.P. It was composed of older people who had a different tradition and never did become the type of "professional" we have elsewhere. In my opinion the "Bolshevization" (or "Iskra-zation") of the branch did us no good. We lost good people and our nucleus of "Bolsheviks" has shown no ability to replace them.

One fact stands out as obvious from this examination of the problem: the mass party won't grow up imperceptibly in our midst. It must be consciously organized under skilled party direction.

We can leave to party discussion questions like how sharply and quickly the turn must be carried through, various techniques to achieve it, how the war-time conditions affect the turn, etc. To such a discussion will be contributed the historical and theoretical knowledge of our leading people and the many organizational experiences of our comrades in shops, unions, and neighborhoods.

The NC must thoroughly discuss the turn and plan it in its smaller aspects. Without this the whole discussion may be worse than worthless. It may be positively harmful by resulting in a liquidation of our present assets without accruing anything to replace them.

For instance, the discussion must take up the question of new branches. In my opinion this will prove the most valuable technique in changing the character of the party. In New York we have three close supporters in Plant X, two contacts in neighborhood Y, another close supporter in plant Y. All six live in Brooklyn. We select three additional people from a Brooklyn branch who have ability as educators and organizers and know from their shop experiences how to get on with workers. The nine of them constitute a new branch. It will be a branch of a different type. It will be a branch of the mass party we are seeking to become. In such a branch one of the first discussions, as it always is with new people, will revolve around bringing new people in. For new members usually always have access to new circles of contacts. The new branch will grow at a faster rate than the old type branch.

In Chicago we have a branch of a dozen comrades old in the movement, with ingrained habits and outlooks. If we have seven or eight people on the South Side or the West Side who subscribe to the paper, agree with our line, are ready to work with us, we would go about organizing them into a branch. We might first organize a class or discussion group as preparatory to forming the branch. When we have had three or four sessions, we would add several experienced comrades to the new recruits and constitute a new branch.

In other words we would use the technique of teaming-up our present trained people with the new people in proportions of 1 to 2 or 1 to 3.

In Pedro we have dumped thousands of papers into the area for almost a year. Surely there must be a dozen or more workers ready to join the mass party. Here too, we would proceed to gather them together, tell them about the party, organize a discussion on the party, and organize a branch. If they are all shipyard workers, take four or five of our ship workers to be the nucleus of the new branch.

What would we expect of the members of such a new branch? Politically, we would expect workers to agree with this minimum program, (a) the class struggle, (b) the need for a workers state. Organizationally, we would expect (a) regular attendance at branch meetings, (b) a modest financial contribution, (c) conducting himself as a party member in his union, (d) the promotion of Labor Action among his shopmates and friends.

Are there not a thousand people in our party sphere of influence who are ready to join such a branch?

Is such a branch and such members in any way short of the mark required to build the party that will take power?

However, one phase of the turn must be stressed again and again and drummed into the heads of people. Namely, that our present people, our trained party core, our "professionals", don't become lost in the mass of such a party. They must become our West Pointers, our Jesuits, our Spartans. Upon their training and rock-hardness will depend the future of the mass party. They will be the backbone of the mass party as the "Iskra-ites" were the backbone of the mass Bolshevik Party and the old Spartacists the backbone of the German CP. From our people we will demand no less than we demand now, no less in activity, in discipline, in sacrifice, in money. They will be the organizers, educators, trade union fraction leaders, writers, colonizers, speakers, functionaries of the mass party. Those who fall to the level of the average newly recruited worker will demonstrate thereby that they are incapable of playing a leading role. They are to be trusted with less responsibility than the newly won workers. For the former is a trained revolutionist who has proved unworthy of his calling. The latter is a soldier of the revolution doing his share in proportion to his understanding and experience. Such a worker is to be preferred on a branch executive committee hundred times over the "professional" turned backslider. These relations will work out in life. Each new experience will accumulate new lessons.

We must plan the turn carefully. Included in such plans must be a period of party-wide discussion. A meeting of the NC enlarged with local activists. A series of national organization tours in which leading comrades supervise and correct the local developments.

Our campaign must set itself a national membership goal. In my opinion 1,000 members by January 1st is a realistic goal to aim at. Or putting it differently, doubling our membership in the course of six months. We must understand that if we bring in 100 new people the first two months, they will become our most active recruiters to expand in the next two months, and the enlarged party with new spirit and new enthusiasm will push us over our goal by the sixth month.

What will our mass party look like in six months with a 1000 members? This change will have profound ramifications up and down and through and through the life of the party. It is impossible to trace all of them. But to begin with, the composition would be changed. We would be a party of proletarians by birth, not merely by chosen occupation. We would vastly alter the national and racial composition of the party. The character of our meetings would change. Old habits would break down. We would have an inner party atmosphere which would make the transition from trade union to party an easy and natural one for the union militant.

These matters will be dealt with in a subsequent article on "A Party Perspective" in which I propose in greater detail with post-war prospects in America and what kind of party is needed.

Let me repeat once more a salient point. The turn can only be carried out consciously. It requires the full attention of our leading people. If the leadership has the imagination, the vision, the drive, it will be done. For all else is present.