

ACTIVE WORKERS CONFERENCE

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THE TECHNIQUE OF RECRUITMENT

A recent Party Bulletin advises unionists to cut out or cut down on "beer hall" schmoozing. It urges more party work and less union activity, pointing to instances of party members subordinating the work of the Party to Union work, to the point of even failing to attend Party meetings.

How can we decide just where to draw the line? Has the beer hall gossiping any value? What relation to recruitment, are the elbow bonding conferences so favored by union men? These are questions which cannot be answered by any standard rule. However, certain general observations may serve as a means of enabling us to establish some kind of balance in our work.

Let's take the average trade union situation. Say we have a couple of members functioning, with a fair amount of ability and intelligence. As a result, the view they express on the floor, attract a few people to them. The Beer Hall schmoozing begins.

Our people elaborate on their views, which of necessity are restricted by time and other factors on the floor. In the elaboration of these views, a group begins to crystallize. Subsequently the group takes form and begins to hold meetings. The meetings deal almost exclusively with union problems. After these meetings, nor beer hall schmoozing. This time on a higher level.

The experiences of the members of our Progressive group, make them ready and eager to discuss the basic causes for the problems the union struggles to solve. The Party members pick out a few of the most reliable members and start talking "Party" to them.

At first this is done in abstract fashion. Discussions about the Government agencies and the part they play, leads to discussions of the role of the State; discussions about the struggle for jobs and more money is explained in terms of the competitive system and contrasted with the possibilities of a system based on production for use.

These discussions if properly conducted, express the experiences, the need and the desires of conscious, progressive trade unionists. Then form and substance are given to the abstract discussions of concrete experience--the what to do about it and the how to do it, enter. The Party is the answer.

Three, four or five progressives are recruited. A period of consolidation sets in. Hand in hand with this, goes the expansion of the influence of the Progressives to the point where they may contest the leadership of sub-leadership of the union. If they succeed in the campaign to establish a progressive leadership in a local, the emphasis for a time will probably be necessarily placed on union work--consolidation of the progressive forces in the union.

And so for perhaps three or four months before and after a big union campaign, all of the talk is about the union. Then once more the Party talk should resume. There can be no standard measuring rod. Each member or group of members have to judge their pace in accordance with the particular conditions encountered.

Generally, recruitment possibilities occur in direct proportion to the amount of energy and intelligence with which members conduct themselves in the union. Consistent, hard union work with a good bit of beer hall schmoozing thrown in,

are absolute requisites for consistent recruitment.

Any sudden withdrawal from Union activity to concentrate on Party work, means a loss of respect among the active members. The ideal condition of course, is when the Party fraction has strengthened itself to the point of enjoying a strong numerical base in the union, so that work can be divided in such a way as to permit emphasizing various aspects of the work, without temporarily seeming to neglect one of more important phases of Party or union work.

Of course, the Party member who can't find time for at least one Party meeting a week, is not functioning properly.

In the actual work of recruitment, it has been our experience that introduction of a term such as Trotskyism at an early stage of contact, can frequently create barriers difficult to surmount. At a later stage--when the contact is practically or actually in the Party, Trotskyism and a lot of other terms can be explained without creating any problem.

Emphasis on the democratic nature of the kind of society we wish to build; on the idealistic aspect of our struggle; on the fighting spirit necessary to create the kind of world we want to make, these are the methods that appear to be most successful in gaining attention.

The overwhelming majority of workers are what we generally call "raw workers." They have conceptions of terms that we might throw out unthinkingly, that are contrary to their real meaning. Trotskyism to many is vaguely some foreign, one man dictator idea. Revolutionary Party means a sinister, secret group out seeking to stir up violence and bloodshed.

An example of the caution and thought that should go into the terms used in both speech and the paper--especially the paper, was an experience at a class held a few months ago. A leading party speaker had casually referred to our party as being a very revolutionary Party. The class, composed of "raw" workers had been obviously impressed by the opinions expressed on the nature of the war. The introduction at the end of the class of the reference to revolution worked a transformation in the thinking of the group.

They left the hall talking about "revolution." Wiped from their minds at least temporarily, were the new ideas on the war that had riveted their attention for almost two hours. Later, these ideas would be viewed with a more suspicious approach because of what they assumed the casual reference to "revolution" to mean.

The next day, the party speaker back for another class, started off by questioning members of the class as to their understanding of the term "revolutionary." After they listed all the commonly accepted opinions, the speaker proceeded to point out how the ruling class always attempted to maintain dominance of their ideas through all of the means at their command. To do this, they frequently resorted to misuse of terms and labels in order to inculcate in the minds of workers, a fear or misunderstanding which might keep them from exercising their rights and strength. An instance was this very term "revolutionary". He then pointed out the real meaning of the term using various analogies. Every one of the workers left the hall that night with a definite conviction that he wouldn't worry about being called a revolutionary in the future.

In this case, the Party teacher had an opportunity to correct a misimpression

that could have raised unnecessary hindrances in our work.

If the paper makes such a slip, it may be weeks or months until the Party worker has an opportunity to learn that Jim Jones decided that Labor Action was just out to stir up trouble, and while it had some good stuff in there, its real purpose was to stir up trouble--make you suspicious of the government; make you suspicious of all the union leaders--make you suspicious of everything.

Now, to us that may be a highly desirable objective. To arouse the critical faculties of the worker, means plenty to us. But it doesn't always work that way. He can turn his suspicions against us--or rather against our motives. So many workers read the paper and begin to suspect our motives.

I believe that to be an indication that we are not doing the job we should do. We don't talk about socialism enough--and in simple terms. All too often we dismiss a union bureaucrat with an adjective instead of explaining just why we think he isn't any good.

For instance in a recent issue of L.A., Johnson refers to Sen. Pepper as "yellow". He fails to explain why he terms him yellow. He says he is a fake liberal. He doesn't go into detail about this either. Thousands of workers think Pepper is a petty good guy. To teach them about Pepper, about Wallace and about trade union bureaucrats, reasons and explanations should be used instead of names.

The paper is an absolutely indispensable weapon in the work of education and recruitment. For that reason, it requires as much attention and discussion as the work of any Party fraction, except that its importance is of course, at least equal to the total number of fractions.

However, it is not the purpose of the writer to go into detail about the paper here. This is merely an attempt to state generally, the methods and techniques of recruiting and to try and place in its proper, important place, the elbow bending or beer hall schmoozing, which is so much a part of the work we must do, because the American working class imbibes so much of its politics and philosophy with its beer.

G. J.

More Socialism in the Paper

Ever since the 1943 Workers Conference the party members have demanded sporadically but insistently that there be "more socialism in the paper." This demand, it is clear, is not to be satisfied by concluding more articles with the slogan "socialism is the only answer", or by adding a column on "Socialist Thoughts" by Marx or Engels, or one on what life would be like under socialism.

It is my belief that this demand on the part of the membership expresses a growing but as yet unclarified dissatisfaction with the agitational character of the paper. By the agitational character of the paper, I mean specifically its preoccupation, on the one hand, with denouncing the intrigues, intentions, and rivalries of the bourgeoisie, and on the other with instructing the masses to break with the bourgeoisie by forming an independent labor party. Agitation of this kind will increase the indignation of the workers against the bourgeoisie and will make many workers sympathetic to the party as having "good ideas" but it will not demonstrate to advanced workers the inevitability of the socialist struggle and the necessity to prepare themselves for leadership of that struggle by joining the party.

Socialism as a living and inevitable development is not in a slogan or in the writings of Marx and Engels. It is in the concrete development of society which make the struggles of the working class objectively a part of the struggle for socialism, whatever their subjective consciousness. The proletariat acts empirically and for immediate needs. But we should make it our business to discern and emphasize in its immediate struggles the way in which it is being led inevitably toward the real, last, decisive and great revolutionary struggle. In this way we clarify the socialist character of the class struggle as it is taking place today and as it will develop.

In the Theses of the Founding Congress of the Fourth International, written in 1938, Trotsky pointed out that "the economy, the state, the politics of the bourgeoisie and its international relations are completely blighted by a social crisis, characteristic of a pre-revolutionary state of society." On the basis of this frankly revolutionary perspective, he went on to discern in the "unprecedented wave of sit-down strikes and the amazingly rapid growth of industrial unionism in the U.S. (the CIO)" "indisputable expression of the instinctive striving of the American workers to raise themselves to the level of the tasks imposed on them by history."

The Theses of the Founding Congress are full of such examples of the way in which Trotsky clarified the socialist character of the day to day struggles of the working class. Using it and the American resolution adopted by the 1944 Conference of the Workers Party (i.e. the present political line and program of the party), Labor Action should proceed week in and week out to point out in terms of current events how the statification of production, due to the war, has concentrated the workers attention on the state; how the demand for full employment hence involves the demand for an economy planned by the government and how the increasing inability of the bourgeoisie to meet this demand impels the workers onto the political scene independently. From this analysis, e.g. of the PAC, the slogan "A Labor Party to form a Workers Government" becomes pregnant with possibilities for mobilizing the masses.

Similarly, with regard to the tempo and course of the coming struggle, Labor Action should constantly point out in terms of the present strikes and the whole problem of reconversion how the war and the international entanglements of the bourgeoisie will precipitate sharp breaks in the objective situation; how the feverish and explosive character of the workers movement will hence be intensified; how these movements will compel the bourgeoisie to a counter-offensive against the working class; how this offensive will demand from the workers more organized, vigorous and widespread struggles, etc. In this way the alternative "Fascism or Socialism" is constantly revealed as a scientific prognosis.

By revealing in this way the socialist character and the revolutionary perspectives of the actions of the workers, the final struggle appears not as a dream in the mind of 300 Trotskyites but as an inevitable climax to the day to day struggles of the working class. On this basis, week in and week out, we can appeal to those who recognize and understand this perspective to join the party in order to prepare themselves for leadership of the struggle. In this way Labor Action becomes both a socialist paper and a recruiting agent.

Labor Action and the Life of the Party

The character of Labor Action is reflected in the life of the party. To say that there should be "more socialism in the paper" is only another way of saying that there is too great a gap between Labor Action and the party, or between the daily struggles of the workers as described in Labor Action and the revolutionary socialist theories of the party as put forward in the New International.

This gap expresses itself in the life of the party members, on the one hand, by what has been called a lack of "recruitment consciousness" and on the other by a neglect of the NI and of education in the Marxist fundamentals.

In my opinion these limitations of the party members are due to the limitations of Labor Action because by and large the method and interests of the work of the members are determined by the method and interests of the party organ which they read most regularly.

The party members will concentrate on recruiting and training socialist cadres, not only from a sense of party loyalty and responsibility, but for the same reason that advanced workers feel compelled to join the revolutionary party, viz., because they are continually shown in concrete terms, and hence can explain to their shopmates, how the actual struggles of the workers are pushing them in a socialist direction and therefore toward support of the revolutionary socialist party. This is needed, particularly, though not solely, by the new members. This is what Labor Action should provide.

If, on the other hand, the party press neglects to clarify and emphasize the socialist character of the day to day struggles of the working class, the perspectives and theories of scientific socialism will begin to appear indirect and abstract to the party members, just as the possibilities of socialism appear Utopian to the workers. Hence, it becomes increasingly difficult for the party members to see the relevance of the Marxist classics to their own immediate education and the education of new recruits. The demand then arises for internal education to become more "popular", i.e. more like the present L.A.

Equally important, it becomes difficult for the party members to discuss the reality and the urgency of the socialist perspective and the building of the party with the workers when it reaches in the press and talks to in the shops. Individual contact work, in which the comrades are expected to supplement or take the contacts beyond the stage of the present Labor Action, becomes instead a repetition of the agitation of the paper. Hence, the gap between the party and the workers is bridged, not by bringing the workers closer to the party as a revolutionary socialist party but by watering down the specific revolutionary socialist propaganda of the party to the apparent level of the consciousness of the workers.

Ria Stone

TRADE UNION UNITY - A PROBLEM FOR OUR PARTY

The desirability of unity between the CIO, AFL and UMW is one of those self-apparent things admitted by all but about which no one does anything. The interests of labor as a whole call for an end of this laissez faire. In the coming period labor will need every ounce of its strength.

• Interunion strife, as foreshadowed in the Detroit auto maintenance dispute, will play into the hands of big business in two ways. It will weaken labor in its demands. It will help the well-planned campaign against unionism as such.

We must bear in mind that both the CIO and the AFL have gained new members during the war years, members who are not trade unionists by virtue of struggle and conviction. It will be difficult enough, in face of widespread unemployment, to keep these new-comers without subjecting them to the spectacle of CIO-AFL fights. Again, there is the difficult and imperative job of organizing the unorganized. How will this task be furthered by interunion bouts? Another consideration is public opinion. Without going into the whys and wherefores of the phenomenon, public opinion has assumed a certain importance in America which cannot be shoved aside. For the fight against fascism and to gain labor's ascendancy, public opinion must be pro-labor. CIO-AFL competition helps none of these causes.

It is correct to say that nothing is being done to further trade union unity. The earlier efforts of the CIO have now been abandoned. The AFL-UMW negotiations have thus far resulted in nothing positive. Labor leaders are motivated by horse-trading objectives and union power politics rather than by the basic urgency of the times we live in. AFL officials see the CIO weakened by post-war unemployment more than it will be itself--so why worry about unity? The shrewd angling for position by labor leaders is much like what we see among capitalist nations.

Worst of all is that there is no rank and file demand for trade union unity--at least, not an articulate one. Without pressure from below, the labor leaders will not change their ways. The rank and file of the CIO, AFL and UMW have to be educated and agitated into wanting and demanding organizational unity. This is where the Workers Party comes in. A survey of the field will show that there is no other force to do the spade work fundamental for union unity.

We, on our part, understand there are serious differences between the CIO and AFL. If there were not, there would have been no split in the first place. The differences are not confined to structural industrial unionism vs. craft unionism. Ideologically the AFL is more engrained with class collaboration. It is more imbued with invidious prejudices like Jim Crowism. In the AFL, internal bureaucratism is the rule. To the extent that dishonesty, graft, gangsterism have a footing in the unions, it is mainly in the AFL. In every way the CIO is a more progressive and more militant organization. The UMW, is of course, the veteran in industrial unionism and in militant union struggle, and the CIO is much closer to it than is the AFL.

The question can be logically posed: Would not the CIO, in order to unite with the more conservative AFL and in order to get along with the more hide-bound AFL leadership, itself become less progressive and less militant? Why not let good enough alone and allow competition in the open field between the two organization take its course? Let the better organization win.

To answer the second question first, in the coming period such competition will be too dangerous a luxury. Unionism as such will thereby be blasted. It is an experiment labor cannot afford.

To the question whether the AFL might act as a ball and chain on the CIO in case of organizational unity, the answer, I think, must be in the negative-- for these reasons: Trade union unity can come only as the result of rank and file pressure. This in itself will mean a progressive development for the ranks of both the CIO and AFL. It will mean that the new elements in the AFL have been saved from indoctrination by the union tops. But above and beyond this one big union of labor will be conducive to much greater labor militancy. What could give labor more consciousness of its strength than its unity?

Unity between the CIO, AFL and UMW can be nothing but a step forward, and not only in the sense that continued disunity serves the cause of big business and fascist reaction, it will be a step forward in the sense of providing the base from which labor can rise to new heights.

So I repeat. The Workers Party must assume the task of trade union unity as its own problem. Towards this end, what are the things to be done?

In the first place, we must, of course, recognize the problem as ours. Next, we must inform ourselves on the various ramifications of the subject. Then we must work out a basis on which unity can be had. This last is indispensable because in our education and agitation we must show that unity is not only necessary, but absolutely practicable. We will have to take into account the problems arising from the many competitive aspects and jurisdictional hostilities that have developed. It may even be expedient to have a minimum and maximum program. Our most informed and competent comrades will have to put their heads together on the whole problem.

LABOR ACTION will naturally shoulder the burden of education and agitation. Not for a day, not sporadically, but steadily, week in and week out, as we educate and agitate for our transitional program and for Socialism, will we have to carry on for trade union unity.

There is another aspect of the question aside from the one that the preservation and development of the union movement demand trade union unity. The realization of our own objective of an Independent Labor Party based on the unions, is also tied in with trade union unity.

Economic disunity extends into the political field. Union power politicians inevitably play their game with capitalist politicians rather than give credit to rival unions. I do not go to the extreme of saying that it is impossible to build an independent labor party based on the unions unless there is organizational trade union unity. But I do say that the present set up among the CIO, AFL and UMW raises very serious obstacles.

The brief history of the CIO -PAC and the total of experience in the last election, show how serious the obstacles are. If it weren't for the war and the special role of FDR in capitalist society, the aversion of AFL-UMW officialdom to the CIO-PAC - based on the economic rivalry among them - would have assumed eye-opening proportions.

I started out by saying the desirability of unity between the CIO-AFL and UMW is self-apparent. Undoubtedly it is for the future of unionism and also for our own political aims. What hasn't been apparent is that here is a job for the Workers Party to do. There is nobody else to do it, I repeat.

Our assumption of this task will add to our prestige among militant unionists and increase our stature in the labor movement.

To reiterate the concrete things to be done by us: 1) study the subject. 2) formulate the basis for trade union unity. 3) LABOR ACTION to go to town on the job of education and agitating rank and file unionists.

SUSAN GREEN