

## ACTIVE WORKERS CONFERENCE

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#### LABOR ACTION AND RECRUITMENT

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The Active Workers Conference is primarily concerned with the question of how the party has functioned since the last convention, the manner in which it carried out or failed to carry out the party program in general and the program of action specifically. Insofar as Labor Action is concerned the problem which is of paramount interest is the role of the paper as a recruiting agent of the party and the use which the party members make of the paper for this purpose.

The character of Labor Action, i.e., whether it should be a propaganda or agitational paper (like the Militant, or like the IWW) is not before the Active Workers Conference. The type of paper Labor Action should be is decided by convention and its character was determined several years ago.

In the early days of the Bolshevik Party, the organization was deeply concerned with the very question of a party paper and its place in the general activities of the party. Lenin, more than anyone else, occupied himself with this problem because he knew that without a paper it was hopeless to think of building a party. In his famous article, "Where to Begin", he described the role of a paper in the following way:

"...the role of a paper is not confined solely to the spreading of ideas, to political education, and to procuring political allies. A paper is not merely a collective propagandist and collective agitator, it is also a collective organizer. With the aid of, and around, a paper, there will automatically develop an organization that will be concerned, not only with local activities, but also with regular, general work; it will teach its members carefully to watch political events, to estimate their importance and their influence on the various sections of the population, and to devise suitable methods to influence those events through the revolutionary party".

In "What is To Be Done", he indicated what a paper would do for the party. He wrote: "The mere function of distributing a newspaper will help to establish real contacts (that is, if it were a newspaper worthy of the name, i.e., if it is issued regularly, not once a month like a big magazine, but four times a month)..."

The scope of organizational work would immediately become ever so much wider and the success of a single locality would serve as a standing encouragement to further perfection and a desire to utilize the experience gained by comrades working in other parts of the country. Local work would become far richer and more varied than it is now; political and economic exposures gathered from all over Russia would provide mental food to the workers of all trades and in all stages of development, would provide material and occasion for talks and readings on the most diverse subjects, ..."

In its most important aspects, Labor Action has pretty well conformed to this concept of the role of a party paper. There are many weaknesses in Labor Action

to be sure, but when measured against the background of the war, available resource manpower conditions, and the general state of the party, it can be said, from purely organizational and administrative views, that the party lags behind the influence of the paper and has by no means made use of the thousands of contacts built up in the past few years during which Labor Action was the only revolutionary expression of the deepest desires and aims of a gradually maturing American working class.

Its campaigns on the home front, (in which it showed that it knew how to translate the struggle against the war into concrete, "national" terms) the struggle for independent political class action, the popularization of the political struggles in Europe, and the developing political and educational features of the paper, has given Labor Action an unprecedented following. It goes without saying, that Labor Action has to take further steps in raising the political and revolutionary consciousness of the more militant and advanced elements of the working class, to draw them closer to the party. This depends in large measure on the activities of the party itself and in the manner in which these activities lend themselves for treatment in the party press.

While it is impossible to overstress the importance of the political, agitational and educational material in Labor Action, it must be borne in mind that the most important part of the paper is that devoted to the labor struggles and those reports which Labor Action carries dealing concretely with particular struggles. This is especially true of the reports which reflect the activities of our party.

The effectiveness of Labor Action as a weapon in the American class struggle has been testified to by almost every branch. Reports which come to the center indicate that the paper does reflect the desires and wishes of the militants in the labor movement. Thus, the paper has given us contacts with outstanding union militants in all parts of the country and in localities where we do not have party members or branches. It has played an effective part in the inner-union struggles against the corroding influence of the labor bureaucracy and has served to galvanize the growing opposition of the rank and file to the class collaborationist policies of the bureaucracy in several localities and unions.

There is no doubt whatever that the paper is way ahead of the party in this respect and that the party has not made the best use possible and necessary of the base given it by the paper. The general solution to this problem is completely interconnected with the general party policies, the activities and character of the branches and the individual comrades.

Labor Action as such, that is, by itself alone, cannot recruit members to the party. It can and does act as a recruiting agent. Recruitment, however, is carried on by a party, by individuals. There is not other way of doing it. Let me indicate some of the more practical ways to utilize Labor Action for party recruitment.

1. Labor Action has a steady circulation of from 20 to 25 thousand; its readers number many thousands more. This circulation is fairly divided among the branches and reflects, more or less, the strength of the branches, their contact with the labor movement and their influence. We have over 4000 subscribers, which is the solid base of the paper and the source of party activity and recruitment.

2. Every branch has, to one extent or another, a picture of the general influence of the paper in its locality. Some of the branches know the subscribers to the paper, and have developed some systematic work among them. But in general for the party as a whole, there had not been this systematic utilization of the subscribers from the point of view of drawing them closer to the party, and with a perspective of making party members out of contact so obtained. Through the sub drives,

many contacts have been made. But as a rule, this work of contacting is desultory, sporadic, inconsistent. The task is to organize this form of recruitment work.

3. Each branch must make a thorough canvass of its subscribers and readers of the paper. This means to talk to such workers, interest them in the party, ascertain their attitudes and aim to recruit them for the party, or to make sympathizers of them for the party. There are any number of subscribers and readers of LA, who are "Labor Action followers". They must be made party followers. (Some comrades have remarked that this fact alone shows "what is wrong" with Labor Action. On the contrary, this is in the nature of things. Our press has built up a following it has laid a base for the party. It now remains for the party to utilize this base for recruitment. It would be sad indeed if the party were to lament the fact that there are many workers who regard themselves as Labor Actionists. It demonstrates that Labor Action has had a tremendous effect on such workers and has made them material for party recruitment.)

4. Party branches should arrange special meetings for Labor Action subscribers and readers. Subscribers and readers should be present at all party public meetings. This requires special efforts to bring them out. Branches should therefore devise special advertising suited to the type of readers we have. General advertising for such meetings should be coupled with personal solicitation, directed to bringing a maximum number of such contacts to party meetings, public affairs, and social gatherings. Reports on Party activities in the paper is an important way of putting the Party's face in Labor Action. There is not a branch in the Party which is not remiss in this respect. Reports of party activities should cover meetings, forums, socials, educationals, classes etc. (See the Militant and how it "builds up" party activities where no real basis for a party column exists.)

5. Special meetings devoted to particular subjects relating to concrete situations should be organized. (Example: During the Willow Run cutbacks a series of public meetings devoted to the subject should have been held with special efforts made to bring down workers affected in order to acquaint them with the party and its program. This can be repeated and duplicated in almost every other party center. This requires that all branches engaged in mass work must make certain that articles and reports on such activities are sent to Labor Action. While at certain times LA has a good coverage of such events as are of national and local importance too often, branches are criminally negligent in sending material to Labor Action. The use of such articles and reports for recruiting purposes is of inestimable value.)

6. The branches must constantly seek to put the party before its Labor Action contacts. That is the main general problem; to show that Labor Action is not alone; that behind it stands a party with a program, which is the source of Labor Action's ideas and program. This means that the meetings of the branches cannot and must not hide behind Labor Action in holding their public affairs. Once this break is made (not through announcements in the paper alone) but in the actual day to day work of the branches, a good deal of the confusion of Labor Action readers would be cleared up.

7. The organization of Labor Action clubs is an extremely important step for us to take as a means of drawing "Labor Actionists" closer to the party and creating a sympathizing periphery as well as a source of additional financial support to the organization and the paper. There is not a city where we have a branch, where the possibility of organizing a Labor Action club of its sympathizing readers does not exist. This holds true for places where no party unit is located. In such a case the direction from the center is indispensable. The decision for the organization of Labor Action clubs was taken a long time ago. One of the reasons for the failure

of the party to make any progress on this score is the absence of effective direction and personnel in the NO. to organize the campaign centrally. But once the decision is taken, its concretization is essentially a local job, and the branches must place this point high on the agenda of its coming activities.

The strength of the party and Labor Action is in its program. Through the skillful use of its program the party, with Labor Action, as the medium, has established a modest base for itself, a base sufficient to permit the branches to utilize it effectively for party growth. Positive results depend entirely upon how the party makes use of the hundreds of contacts for recruitment purposes. This requires, in the first place, that recruitment becomes the daily task of all the branches, the central aim of all their work. It means to develop such activities as will bring the Labor Action reader closer to the party and finally, into its ranks. This means that the identification of the Party and Labor Action must be established. The carrying out of the minimum ideas presented here, relating them to the general party activities (see organization and trade union reports) will give us the opportunity of making important strides forward. Then Labor Action will truly become the "collective organizer" of the Party.

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#### PRESS REPORT

The New International, which is one of the most important institutions of the party, has been a source of great concern to the ranks and the leadership of the party because of its irregular appearance. The irregular appearance of the NI, is the result, not of lack of interest, but the serious weakness in necessary personnel at the center, technical difficulties not of our making and a failure of leading, qualified and responsible comrades to contribute in a literary way to the magazine. The magazine has become the burden of less than a handful of comrades who are already overburdened with other tasks which militate against theoretical work. Yet the maintenance of the NI, its regular issuance, and its devotion to the important theoretical and political problems of revolutionary socialism is indispensable to the all-round functioning and the training of the party members.

Recent efforts will make it possible to issue the magazine regularly and promptly.

For a considerable period of time, some comrades have proposed what is tantamount to the liquidation of the theoretical organ of the party. Proposals for a quarterly magazine which would take on the form of a booklet, have been made. Others would like to see the New International become more like Politics, whose outstanding characteristic is its absence of politics, or thoroughly false politics. Still others think that the NI should be like the Nation or New Republic, or speak of the NI being "scooped" in news by Politics. All of these proposals we believe to be utterly false. What is necessary is a strengthening of the NI along its present lines, i.e., making a better, more consistent, theoretical organ of Marxism. The comrades who make the proposals referred to, or countenance such views, actually reveal a lack of understanding of what the role of the party's theoretical organ is, or reflect unhealthy political concepts and beliefs.

The Party's theoretical magazine is for the purpose of the theoretical and political education of the party and its sympathizers. It cannot become a magazine-newspaper, a cultural magazine, or an aesthetic journal satisfying particular interests of a few people. Such journals have a place in the revolutionary movement, but it is utterly unthinkable that our party, at this stage of its development can even think in those terms where the problem is essentially one of maintaining its

its present theoretical organ.

Experience has shown that when an issue of the NI has a varied content of more than ordinary interest, the magazine not only sold well but awakened a new interest in the NI.

When I speak of the caliber of the NI, comrades should understand that it is made in relation to a time when the standard of the magazine was quite high. Its standards are still high. One need only compare it to the Fourth International to grasp how true this is. But even more important, from the point of view of rate of development of the theoretical and political level of the party, the magazine is on an extremely high level. This holds for a number of "older" comrades in the party whose theoretical and political development has not kept pace with their years in the movement.

For this reason, the failure to use the NI in the theoretical and political education of the comrades by branches is sheer neglect. There is not a branch in the party which cannot make this kind of use of the NI in its branch educational work. The magazine can also be profitably utilized for such work among the closest sympathizers of the party and these include many workers whom we contact in the factories.

It will be a foremost task of the party in the post-conference period to pay close attention to the promotion of the NI, to increase its present unwarranted low subscription list, and to increase its circulation in general, from its present low.