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ACTIVE WORKERS CONFERENCE

BULLETIN V

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## On the Kind of Party We are Building

By Ernest Lund

The first question that must be clarified at our Party Conference deals with the kind of party we are building. The agenda of the conference has correctly included this as its first point. Until this is clearly established and understood by the organization as a whole, all talk about how to build the party will give rise to misunderstanding and confusion.

When we speak about the kind of party we are building, what we have reference to specifically are the tasks of today and the immediate period ahead. There is, of course, agreement on the kind of party needed to make the socialist revolution. We aim to build a party like Lenin's. It will conform to the requirements of the American scene as the Bolshevik Party conformed to the requirements of the Russian. Its political program and organizational principles have long ago been established in our movement.

But the road from our organization of a few hundred members to the party of the tens of thousands needed to take power is not only a long one, but it is a devious and uneven road. It is not only a matter of a continual adding on of numbers. The building of the party goes through various stages. These stages are dictated to us by both the internal needs of our own organization and by the circumstances in which we must operate.

How one builds in one stage is often quite different from the tasks in another stage. The tasks of the party in each stage will determine how we solve our various problems in the fields of organization, agitation, press, propaganda, trade union activity, etc. Our tasks for the period determine what kind of paper we publish and where we sell it; the relative importance of our paper to our theoretical magazine and the contents of the latter; the kind of public meetings we hold and whom we seek to attract to them; the kind of discipline we demand; the kind of dues system we operate; the kind of headquarters we maintain; the kind of social affairs we run; the way in which we concentrate or disperse our party forces; the place where we locate our national center; the aims we set ourselves in the trade unions, etc.

Our party conference will not gather to discuss these things in a vacuum. We have behind us a history as a political movement. Since the expulsion of the original Trotskyite core from the Communist Party in 1929, the American movement has gone through various stages. The C.L.A. period, the merger with the Muste organization, the entry into the Socialist Party, the organization of the S.W.P., the fight against Cannonism, and the founding of the Workers Party all mark milestones on the road of our development. But the milestones here mentioned are only the obvious organizational forms through which we passed. The two milestones that loom larger than any of these from the point of view of the organizational stage of our development are: (1) the development of the transitional program and (2) the shift of our membership into industry. The significance

of these developments for our movement forms the fulcrum upon which our tasks of today must rest. We shall return to these two developments shortly.

What did we have at the beginning of our development? We had a program and a half dozen people. The main thing was the program. It is and remains the foundation of any political movement. Our program was the concentration of nearly a century of Marxist theory and experience. It was and remains our greatest asset.

What was our aim? Our aim was to gather around this program the forces that would build a party capable of achieving power. However, 3 people or 100 or 10,000 do not become a party merely because they have a political program. They can call themselves a party, but that does not mean that they can play the role of a party. A party becomes such only when it takes an active part in the class struggle by giving leadership, if not to the majority of the class it seeks to represent, then at least to an important section of it.

We could not act as a party if for no other reason than that we began our existence in complete isolation from our class.

We were cut off from the politically conscious workers (C.P. and S.P.) because of the degeneration of those movements and our adherence to a revolutionary Marxist program.

We were cut off from the mass of the workers organized in the trade unions because our movement had few workers in the ranks. The overwhelming majority of our members were neither in the factories nor in the unions. By and large our composition consisted of white collar workers, students, intellectuals and a few politically educated workers from the old Communist movement.

Nor was giving active leadership in the class struggle the first task that faced the movement. The first task was to develop its own program and to educate and train in the spirit of that program those party militants who are the indispensable backbone of a revolutionary organization. Without the backbone of self-sacrificing "professionals", the members who place the movement and its demands above all else in life, the organization becomes nothing but a huge jelly-fish. This party core is attracted and hammered out on the foundation of program and principles. Our program was the program of a theoretical grouping, a political faction outside the great mass movements. We fought on the question of the New Course (workers democracy), the theory of "Socialism in One Country", Thermidor, Bonapartism, degenerated workers state, the reform of the Comintern, the strategy of the world revolution (Germany, China, Britain, Spain, France, the colonial question) and, later, for the creation of the new international. We were the experts in revolution at a time when the revolution was everywhere in retreat and the workingclass was fighting rear-guard actions (anti-fascism) under the leadership of our political enemies. We could, in our isolation, argue for our program only on the basis of theory and history. Consequently we had to address ourselves to those familiar with theory and history (or those willing and able to study theory and history). This excluded in the

United States the mass of the industrial workers. Conversely it gave us the non-workingclass composition which further emphasized our isolation.

The main task of this period was, therefore, propaganda for the theories and principles of Marxism as developed, above all, through the work of Leon Trotsky. Our existence as a propaganda group rather than a party was not only inevitable but an absolutely necessary first step.

By 1938 we had exhausted all attempts to win over "en bloc" large groups of politically organized workers. Our program had, in the main, been worked out. Our party core had been gathered and trained. This phase was completed.

It was useless to argue that our core was too small or too inexperienced. The chances of increasing them, of maturing and hardening them by a continued existence as a propaganda group could yield no results. A movement that remains a sect arguing for program when that period has passed will suffer from an increasing growth of sterility, sectarianism, disillusionment and disintegration.

A movement does not, however, decide at a certain point that from now on it will cease being a propaganda group and will now become a party. It does, however, take a definite step in this direction when it turns the main emphasis of its work toward the broad stream of the workingclass as a whole. Trotsky was the first to recognize that the movement would end in a blind alley if it did not turn from propaganda among the advanced politicals as its main activity and turn toward agitation in the ranks of the mass movement. This recognition gave rise to Trotsky's developing a program of transitional demands for our movement.

For Trotsky our transitional program was to become a bridge with which we could find a point of contact between our theories and principles and the daily problems of the workers in the class struggle. The adoption of the transitional program marked our turn toward agitation among the mass of workers. Our adoption of the Labor Party slogan further emphasized this turn.

But a movement with a non-workingclass composition, with no real ties with the mass movement of the workers, and burdened with the habits of ten years activity as a propaganda group cannot transform itself overnight, above all not with a leadership which lacked boldness and imagination, as was the case in the S.W.P. The transitional program remained mainly a subject for literary and journalistic effort, with the sole exception of the anti-fascist street demonstrations. Without members in the trade unions, it could not be otherwise.

In 1940 occurred two developments that permitted a new advance in our turn toward the workingclass. (1) We broke with the

Cannon regime and launched out on our own. (2) The rise in industrial employment due to the war started the shift of the first of our members into the plants.

Our physical isolation from our class was beginning to end. The overwhelming significance of this fact has not yet penetrated the thinking of many of our members, above all many of the old-timers. Having known no other existence for our movement except its complete isolation, they took this as the normal form of existence for a revolutionary socialist current. Where the old-timers were not personally effected and remained in their old occupations, a sectarian political outlook was reinforced by their own petty bourgeois existence. Having failed to comprehend the significance of our isolation before the war and having, consequently failed to comprehend the new situation since 1942, they continue to think of today's party problems and tasks in terms of yesterday's. The development of the party does not exist for them as a succession of steps and stages but as an unending repetition of the same tasks and activities, conceived of and executed today as they were ten years ago.

With the shift of the bulk of our members into industry we have, for the first time in our history, overcome our organizational isolation from our class. The overcoming of our political isolation will, of course, depend upon objective factors like the economic situation, the sharpening of the class struggle, and the growing political consciousness of the workingclass.

But the ending of our organizational isolation alone has a tremendous significance for us. It has already brought about a considerable transformation of our party. During the period of 1940 to 1942 the entire center of activity for our movement has shifted toward a direct participation in the life and problems of the labor movement. New tasks, new needs, and new opportunities confronted us everywhere. The existence of the shop and the union as the center of our activity required that we have an agitational paper that would make itself a part of the life and problems of the shop and union. We developed our Labor Action into the excellent class struggle agitator it has become because our presence in the labor movement would be valueless if we did not have a party voice tuned to the job to be done there. The circulation of our paper rose to undreamed of heights, not only in distribution but also in subscriptions. The presence of our members in the trade unions gave the activity of our fractions a paramount importance. The direction of our trade union work made the post of trade union secretary one of prime importance rather than the decorative office it had been in the previous periods.

What was the aim of all this agitation and activity in the workingclass, above all in the unions? We were seeking to lead the workers in the class struggle. When we took a leading part in the life of a progressive group or a union local, when we were influential in shaping and moulding its policies, we were setting in motion a section of the workingclass (regardless of how small) in the class struggle. (Witness our role at several of the CIO conventions.

Labor Action does not act as the organ of a propaganda group. It plays the role of a political agitator, giving direction in the class struggle in conformity with a definite program, i.e., it speaks as if it is the voice of a party.

Our members in the shops do not act as the members of a propaganda group. Like our press they make the current class struggle issues (No-strike pledge, WLB, re-conversion, etc.) the basis of their political activity. They seek to intervene in every phase of the life of the working class in their shop and union. They seek to shape, mould, and, if possible, lead its struggles. This is the role played by the members of a party.

It has been our tendency, through our press and through our activities in the labor movement, to more and more act like a party in this sphere of work.

But the internal life of our party and its own conception of its role continues to be more that of a propaganda group.

The new tasks imposed upon us by our presence in the shops and unions pushes us forward in one direction.

Our limitations in size and forces and the dead weight of sectarian habit and out-worn conceptions drags us backward in another direction.

The national leadership has, more by practical measures than planned direction, pushed forward, i.e. toward acting like a party. But our development has been uneven and contradictory precisely because the perspective and tasks are not always clear, neither in the leadership nor in the ranks. It is the contradiction between a mass agitational press and class struggle activities in the shops on the one hand and our existence as a propaganda group on the other which, in the absence of a clear and bold lead, threatens a crisis in the work of the organization.

We no longer conduct ourselves like a propaganda group in our press and trade union activity. But our internal life and general activity as an organization does not follow through on this path. To do so would require acting more like a party and less like a propaganda group.

We publish a mass agitational paper that is doing an excellent job of popularizing our transitional demands and giving a lead to the workers on the class struggle issues of the day. But our paper is not the face of our organization. Workers can read it for a year or more without knowing anything about the Workers Party as an organization. It seems to exist separate and apart from the organization. It does not build an allegiance to the Workers Party as an organization but rather to the paper itself. Every once in a while, dissatisfied with its single-level agitational note, we try to go beyond the transitional demands. In these instances we revert to our propagandist approach of yesterday (i.e. the Trotskyist program in the narrow sense) rather than to propaganda flowing

from the needs created by our activity of today (i.e. fundamental education in Marxian Socialism). We "throw in" some advanced concepts of the international Trotskyist movement -- articles, phrases, references -- which seem to have no connection with the rest of the material. This is not a journalistic problem. It does not lie at the door of the editors. It is a political problem. It is one of the results of our lack of understanding and clarity about the tasks of today, above all, what kind of party we are building.

We publish a monthly magazine. It has no real relationship to our paper or the actual class struggle activity of the party. If Labor Action is a mile ahead of the organization, then the New International is a mile behind the organization. Between the two is a chasm that even the bulk of the new party members do not bridge. If the magazine is unsuitable for our new members from the shops, it is even less suitable for party contacts who are today the friends of our new members from the shops. The question of "what to do with the magazine" which we hear so frequently will only be answered when we are clear about what to do with the party.

In the course of three years we issue one book and four pamphlets. Only one of them was the result of planning based on an understanding of the party's tasks. What was the crying need that made "The New Course" the one book to publish if we were limited to that? Why was the rather long pamphlet on India so necessary if we were limited to so few publications? "Incentive Pay" and "Cost Plus Wage" backed up our agitation but neither gave us anything to advance the reader beyond the level of Labor Action. "Plenty for All" was written by the decision of the National Committee based upon the demand voiced at the Cleveland conference and several branch requests. We would be far advanced in our educational activity both within and without the organization, had the other three pamphlets and the book been devoted to taking up with Marxist education where "Plenty for All" left off. Our record on pamphlets is again a result of not knowing just what kind of party we are building in this stage.

The party holds an active workers conference in 1943. The agenda deals with the problems of the party: education, press, agitation, trade union activity, recruitment, etc. The conference is very successful. Everyone leaves feeling that at last we are on the road ahead. The conference reflected the life and needs of the organization in the class struggle.

We hold a convention in 1944. The convention is everything that the conference was not. The conference reflected today. The convention reflected yesterday. The conference reflected the activities of the Workers Party. The convention reflected the activities of the Communist League of America. The conference reflected Labor Action. The convention reflected the New International. The conference sent morale up. The convention sent it down. The delegates left the conference to translate its decisions into the activity of the party. The delegates left the convention to take up again the tasks laid aside for pre-convention discussion.

Comrade Shaachtman speaks at a mass meeting on the Russian Revolution in New York. The speech has little point of contact with the contacts of Labor Action or with the contacts from the shops who attend. The speech reflects our propaganda group activity of yesterday.

Comrade Shaachtman speaks before two sessions of a party school in Philadelphia attended overwhelmingly by industrial workers. He speaks about war, imperialism, revolution, politics, and the Labor Party. The workers leave feeling a head taller in their understanding of world politics.

The New York speech (for "sophisticates") reflects the propaganda group of yesterday.

The Philadelphia speeches (for "raw" workers -- three of whom joined the party) reflects the movement of today.

The party adopts positions on the political questions that arise from the class struggle (PAC, position on the elections, etc.). The nature of the problems that come before our National Committee increasingly reflect the life and struggle of the American workingclass as our members come up against them in the labor movement. This development reflects the movement as it is developing today.

The positions are put forth in our press. But there is no central direction given to the party as to the tactics in carrying out our line in the labor movement. The general propagandist explanation of our position we learned well in our activity of yesterday. The more exacting task of directing our forces in the struggle is a task we must learn and carry out today.

Our branches and fractions meet throughout the country. Their agendas reflect the problems of the party as they are. The agenda of the Political Committee is New York, however, is a reflection of the branch and fraction agendas only as the latter forces themselves upon the former rather than vice versa. The two cross each other more often by way of questions from the field than by way of directives to the organization from the center.

Our difficulties today arise from not understanding how to build a movement that logically flows from and conforms to our new sphere of activities: our mass paper and activity in the factories.

We are trying to squeeze the fruit of today's labors (agitation and class struggle activity) into yesterday's mould (a propagandist organization). As a result, much of it is being lost.

We must understand once for all, that given a membership in industry, given the trade unions as our main sphere of activity, and given a mass agitational paper as our public voice, we cannot escape building an organization that reflects these activities. Those who are opposed to this step consciously and who fight against it, are quite logical and consistent when they make the agitation-



al character of Labor Action the main object of their attack. But for the rest of the organization it becomes necessary to either agree with this attack upon Labor Action and make our paper conform to our organizational life as a propaganda group or to make our organizational life reflect our paper and our class struggle activities.

What kind of organization flows from the existence of our mass paper, our ties with the factories, and our activities in the class struggle? Can we call our little organization of a few hundred members a party?

It is dangerous and confusing to get tangled up in terminology unless we are quite accurate in understanding what the terms mean. This is what often happens in discussions of "vanguard party", "mass party", "propaganda group", "party of the class", etc.

This much must be established for clarity in our discussion. An organization can have 10,000 members and be a propaganda group. An organization can also have a few hundred members and, at least, approximate a party in its activity and public life.

The entire history of our organized existence has been part of our struggle to build a party. Since 1942 we have undergone qualitative changes in the nature of our existence and our activities. We act more like a party of the class struggle today than did the united SWP prior to 1940 with twice our membership. Then we recruited mainly students and white collar workers via the "Russian question", via the Moscow Trials, via the Spanish revolution, via the People's Front question. Today we recruit industrial workers via our participation in the class struggle, via our agitational press, via their class experiences, and via their belief that the program of the Workers Party is the solution to their problems as workers. A political organization composed of a few hundred of such workers, based upon our program, must increasingly act in relation to the workingclass and the class struggle as a party if it hopes to grow in size and influence. It is in the direction of this kind of party that the very logic of our agitational press and class struggle activity has been carrying us. This is the kind of party we are building. What we need do is to recognize it and consciously plan and co-ordinate every phase of party life in conformity with it. This is the task that faces our party conference.

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April 12, 1945

## The Party Core: Leadership and Our Lack of Forces

By Ernest Lund

"Organization is people". This truth must be emphasized again and again to uproot all notions that organization consists of desks, offices, mimeograph machines and party posts created by motions without thought for who is available to fill them.

But a truth can sometimes blind us to the truth. The truthful observation that "organization is people" does exactly this when we regard it as the final answer to our problem and not as the truthful analysis from which to proceed in answering our problem.

We need not minimize the party's desperate lack of "people" — that is, capable, trained and politically educated activists. The war has practically broken the back-bone of the organization in this respect. Our loss was not only a quantitative loss, it was also qualitative. Those called away represented a good section of the national leadership and an overwhelming section of the secondary or local leadership. It left us with the top group in the center (considerably weakened), a sprinkling of secondary leaders, a rank and file predominantly made up of women, and many new members who have joined in the last period. Having fully comprehended this, having experienced all the headaches which it produces, we have still to base ourselves upon what we have and plan to move forward. There is no other way. Moaning over the situation and hoping for the speedy return of our qualified people will not solve anything. Nor does it help matters to accuse those who propose steps to move forward of not understanding that "organization is people."

Despite our desperate lack of experienced people, we still must base our perspective, not upon what we lack, but upon what we have. We have a few hundred people in the factories and the unions; we have a mass agitational paper, and we have the first beginnings of recruitment from the shops. As pointed out in a previous article, given this sphere of activity, we must move in a certain direction. This means specifically, acting less like a propaganda group and acting more like a party that offers leadership to workers in the class struggle.

Do we then ignore our weaknesses in experienced secondary leaders? No, we take this into account. But our weakness cannot determine the direction in which we move. It can only affect the speed with which we obtain our objectives. If we had the necessary trained people, we would move in this direction more rapidly.

However, the question of how rapidly we can progress is not what is in dispute. People may vary in their estimates on this. But it is not decisive. What is decisive is that we do not move consistently on the basis of a clear perspective.

Those who are most ready to point to our lack of forces

should be the first to protest against this inconsistency and lack of co-ordination in moving in a specific direction. Because it is our lack of clarity as to just what kind of organization we are trying to build that leads us to continually squander precious resources, both in men and money. The only way a little army can lick a big army is by concentrating all its forces at a specific objective. Our problem is that we are not quite clear as to what that objective is. We move toward it by detours and by diversions to fight on too many fronts at the same time. Given small forces and meagre resources we must carefully choose what is most important by way of books and pamphlets, by way of party discussions, by way of party education, by way of public meetings, by way of party schools, by way of trade union objectives, by way of cities in which to concentrate, by way of unions and industries, by way of points of distribution for the paper and magazine, etc. If each of these various fields of party work is channeled and aimed in one direction, we shall achieve an economy of forces that will help overcome our shortcomings.

The presence of our members now away would not by and of itself guarantee our moving in this direction. We do not know how they will see things upon their return. They will have developed away from the common experiences of the organization. They may not understand our new problems and might continue to see the organization in terms of the same problems and solutions of the period when they left. Or their contact with the great mass of Americans may have given rise to many opportunist concepts as to how to quickly accommodate the organization to the backwardness of the mass. It is false to believe that their return is an automatic solution to our problems. The question of where we are going must still be answered on the basis of our presence in industry and the existence of our mass paper. Our organization must still reflect these facts.

The experiences of our local organizations has been that the existence of a core of old-timers does not always guarantee a smooth transition to our tasks. They often continue to see our tasks in terms of yesterday's propaganda activity. The New York organization is still our greatest concentration of political experience. But it drags behind sections of the party with a weaker political core in the turn toward reflecting our new sphere of activities. Nowhere do we seem more distant from the life and problems of the labor movement than in New York. This despite advantage of size, national leadership, and a paper published in its own city. In large measure this is due to the factors beyond our control: the character of N.Y. industry, its workingclass, the strength of the Stalinists, etc. For the last several years Southern California had the next greatest concentration of "politicals". Until the very recent period, when many of them are no longer about, the organization was our worst example of widespread trade union "activism" on one hand and a rigid, sectarian, inner-life on the other.

These examples do not prove that we have no need for politically developed people as the core of the party. It does

show that their presence of and by itself is no guarantee that we will move in the right direction. Their value is wasted without a proper lead from the national organization in terms of what our perspective is and what our next tasks are.

Our new recruits from the shops need the political training which only the old party core can impart. But these new workers in our party are not a problem from the standpoint of pushing the organization in the right direction. They instinctively seek to make the organization act more like a party and less like a sect. They err in this respect in over-simplifying the problem and attempting too much. It is precisely in this respect that we need the more experienced people. But too often the more experienced people are so wedded to routine and out-dated habits and concepts that they not only check the excesses of new recruits but also pour cold water upon their efforts to transform the party to meet its new needs. Supporters such as we have attracted through Labor Action in Seattle, the Mesabi and other places will achieve results along new lines of work precisely because "they do not know better", as old-timers would put it.

There is too great a tendency to see the problem of adding new industrial workers onto an organization with a weak political core in terms of the "watering down" of our revolutionary firmness. Unless the party is presented to them in a "watered-down" version before they join, we need have no fears on this score. Those who join because they know that we are a revolutionary socialist organization are not the kind that tend toward opportunism. Their elementary understanding of Marxist principles leads them rather to seeing our concrete tasks in an over-simplified manner. This is best put by the member who objects to a course of action being proposed in a fraction on the grounds that it "does not follow the book." His reference is to Lenin's "What is To Be Done" which he has just read. Had a group of new worker members been in the Southern California branch two years ago they would have instinctively resisted the tendency to lose sight of the party in a long series of trade union maneuvers.

In branches like "southeast" and Stretcor our comrades honorably conduct themselves as members of the Workers Party. With two or three more politically experienced people in either locality we would make much greater progress. But the fear of opportunism is never raised because of their absence. This fear of what "raw" workers will do to our party is born of a petty bourgeois condescension to industrial workers and not out of any concrete experiences of our party.

Speaking at the Third Party Congress in London in 1905, a congress at which not a single delegate was a worker, Lenin said: "The workers have a class instinct, and even with little political experience they quite quickly become steadfast Social Democrats. I would very much like to see eight workers on our committees for every two intellectuals." A year later, as the revolutionary tide was sweeping the workers into action, Lenin wrote: "At the Third Congress I expressed the desire that Party

committees should include about eight workers to every two intellectuals. How out of date that wish has become! Now we must wish that in the new Party organization, for every member of the Social Democratic intelligentsia, there are several hundred Social Democratic workers!" Arguing against the "professionals" who continued to identify the party with themselves and feared that it would become dissolved in the mass, Lenin wrote: "Do not build yourself imaginary terrors comrades!" (Memories of Lenin by N.K. Krupskaya) We would do well to proceed in the spirit of Lenin's advice.

Brother [redacted] of Buffalo hit the nail on the head at the Cleveland party conference in 1943 when he said that the party would do well to worry less about "raw" workers in its ranks and more about the "raw" students.

Bolshevism has always been granite hard in its principles and most flexible in its methods of organization. Whom one admits into the party depends upon the time and place. Our situation today dictates that we hold wide open the gates of the party for industrial workers. We need not fear those who join a revolutionary anti-war party in the midst of war. The only basis for such fear must rest upon a feeling that those who join do not understand what we stand for. I do not believe that Labor Action, our meetings, our classes, etc. can be accused of watering down our views to make this possible.

We control the party apparatus and the means of education. We can well afford to open the party gates to the workers, even with our small core of politically experienced people to absorb them. The party apparatus and educational system must be geared to integrating the new members. Those who prove "indigestible" will fall by the wayside and we shall not be the losers for it.

This requires strengthening all organizational and educational measures that offer some degree of compensation for the weakness of our local leaderships. In the first place this means central direction. It will do us little good to send our few national officers scurrying around from one local trouble spot to another trying to patch up situations while the party center is left unattended. It will prove more profitable in the long run that local comrades refrain from demanding personal visits from the center to settle problems that can possibly be settled locally and permit the national center to flood the organization with correspondence and directives. Priority must be given to directives, letters, party discussions, conferences, manuals, outlines, pamphlets, training schools, and generally speaking, loads of written material. This is no solution for the absence of competent local people. But this is the only possible line along which we can begin to solve the problem.

In the absence of local leaders, we must concentrate our forces with this problem in mind. With our small number of experienced secondary leaders, we would be much better off with 6 local

organizations of 50 members each than with 30 locals of 10 members each. A local of 50 people does not require a party core 5 times the size of one required for 10 people. This means that we cannot build up the entire national organization evenly. It would be a mistake to give priority to those locals which are weak just because they are weak. We must concentrate to build up those sections where we already have achieved some kind of a foothold in the labor movement (Philadelphia, Buffalo, Akron, Detroit, California). Otherwise we will scatter our precious human material in branches of 5 and 10 where their best efforts will only hold together what we have or yield results after some years.

We must not forget that among the new industrial workers entering our party we will find some excellent material for local party leadership. We must seek them out and give them party responsibilities. Where necessary this must be done even at the expense of our work in the trade unions where they are active. Our trade union work will be meaningless without a party leadership locally. After a year in the party the worker becomes a source of strength in contributing to the political education and integration of the new recruits. Often his "common language" with them more than makes up for his lack of polish in political discussions.

In some of our branches the only solution to their problems is through the addition of a large number of workers. Our Chicago organization, for example, would not collapse under the weight of a dozen new worker members. It will stagnate without them, however. Nothing better could happen to our N.Y. organization than to have it "flooded" with 75 "raw" workers who are not quite sure about "Trotskyism" but who have Socialism in their minds and the class struggle in their bones. The "headache" caused by new members are to be as much welcomed as we flee from the headaches caused by stagnation.

However, at this point the discussion of our problem is usually met with the cry that "the objective situation is not ripe", the "workers are not ready to join." This is expanded to remind us that the lack of party forces is exactly what prevents our growth, that recruiting requires politically educated people, etc.

All of this has truth in it. But it must be understood in proper proportion. With a few dozen full time organizers we would recruit faster regardless of other failings. But this cannot become the panacea for our problems. The presence of politically developed people has been no guarantee for the growth of the N.Y. party. The growth of the Philadelphia branch has been due to the new people and not primarily to the party core. Our new worker members can recruit. Of this we need have no fears. Their weakness is in educating the new members.

If the party knows what it wants by way of organization, it will recruit. But we must begin to influence recruitment as a party to help our members swing this and that worker into the

organization. This means giving the organization a public face. Our party remains too hidden in our activities to influence recruitment. We need a party press -- not a house organ like the S.P. "Call" -- but a party voice. The Workers Party -- as an organization -- must break into the consciousness of the readers of Labor Action. We need loads of pamphlets and outlines. We need application cards and membership cards. We must act seriously and with greater formality. In short, we must increasingly act like a party. These measures must take precedence over other things. If we lack the forces to get out a monthly theoretical magazine because we have devoted them to this problem, we will be the stronger to get out a better magazine later. Just because our local leadership is weak we cannot ask our people to recruit and educate bare-handed. We must provide the material for their task.

True enough, the objective situation is not ripe for the rapid growth of a mass revolutionary party in this country. But that does not mean that dozens of advanced trade union activists who today subscribe to Labor Action cannot be brought into our party monthly. Workers join everything else. Even the S.P. and the decrepit S.L.P., not to speak of the S.W.P. are growing.

Our development toward becoming a party -- i.e. giving leadership to groups of workers in the class struggle -- becomes easier the larger our forces in a given situation. This requires understanding where to concentrate our meagre forces. As a propaganda group in the past we fared best where we operated in a politicalized atmosphere, i.e., among workers under the influence of the Socialists or Communists. This is not true today where our role is giving leadership in the struggle. Today we fare best where we confront the workers as the only class party in the field, counter-posed to the bourgeois forces. Where the issue is "Trotskyism" versus Stalinism in a shop, we make much slower headway than in shops where we represent class struggle policies and Socialism against the bourgeois-minded labor leaders and the company. We must favor those shops, unions, industries, neighborhoods, and cities where we have the clearest field to act as a class party and not as a faction. Once we have achieved a foothold in the mass movement anywhere, we have demonstrated our ability to lick all comers. This is because our class struggle actions speak much louder with the workers than our theoretical propaganda. This constitutes our big disadvantage in having 40% of our membership concentrated in New York with its 20,000 or so C.P. members. We would be far better off with 100 members, the national office, and Labor Action located in Detroit and 35 members in New York. Today the reverse is the case.

With few forces we must concentrate to achieve breakthroughs in a few well-chosen spots and then exploit them to the maximum. This approach offers the hope of putting us on the national scene as a serious contender. If the old S.W.P. had a situation like Minneapolis in 5 cities instead of one it would have been a serious national force in the labor movement. If less

than a dozen people can achieve what we have in Philadelphia, 50 people here would achieve a minor revolution in the local labor movement.

The mass revolutionary socialist party that will lead the workers of this country to power is yet to appear. It will, no doubt, be the result of a considerable period of re-groupment on the American labor political scene. Groups from varied backgrounds will find their path to it. It is our firm belief that we will play the leading role in building this party. But we will not win this leading position through the excellence of our propaganda on behalf of our program. We will win it through the excellence of our activity in the class struggle based upon our program. The Muste organization merged with the old C.L.A. as a result of being more impressed by Minneapolis than by the "New International". The latter is a necessary weapon to clarify our views and educate our members and supporters. It will also bring to us many valuable and serious intellectual and politically educated people. But we will progress as a movement as we learn to act like a party. Our program will conquer -- but it will conquer as we translate it into action in the class struggle.

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May 6, 1945



## The Transitional Program and the Labor Party Slogan

In 1938 Trotsky presented to the American party his ideas on the "transitional program" which we wanted the party to present to the American workingclass. According to Trotsky the political level of the workingclass was far behind the objective situation, the social crisis. It was in order to bridge the gap that the transitional program was presented. It was called "transitional" because, while short of a full revolutionary socialist program, its demands did not take the present social system as their base, and the struggles for these demands would bring the workers into conflict with capitalism and carry them beyond the frame work of the capitalist system, and to the very threshold of the socialist revolution.

Later the labor party was proposed as a demand in harmony with the transitional program, and part of it for the U.S. An independent labor party, linked to the "expropriation of the 60 families", "workers control of production", and a "workers government", and as a step in attaining these demands, is a transitional demand.

While the formation of a labor party, any kind of a real labor party, would be a progressive step on the part of the workingclass, our job is to advocate one with a transitional program. This point of view is at present the official position of the party, as adopted in January, 1944, and contained in a six page section of the resolution on "The Political Situation and the Tasks of the Party." This section was called, significantly, "A Labor Party and a Workers' Government." It is well worth re-reading and re-affirming and living up to. Some of the most important and relevant statements from the resolution follow: (Emphasis mine unless otherwise stated)

"The increase of government intervention and direct participation in every sphere of economic life, and in social life in general, is calculated to heighten the political consciousness of the American worker to an ever greater extent." (page 2)

"The struggle for a Labor Party (is) the most important and most urgent political task of the revolutionary vanguard." (p.3)

While urging the formation of an independent labor party based on the trade unions and democratically controlled by them, it (the W.P.) nevertheless counterposes to the adoption or retention of a reformist program and a reformist leadership by such a party, the adoption of a militant, bold working class program of struggle against the capitalist offensive, the capitalist class and capitalism itself with the aim of raising labor to the position of ruler of the country in a Workers' Government." (p. 4)

"To direct them (events) in a forward direction, which means in the general direction of the socialist power of the proletariat, means concretely, now, in the United States, to concen-

trate and centralize all political agitation, propaganda and activity around the slogan of a Labor party and a Workers' Government. A labor party as a radical break with the parties of capitalism, a Workers' Government as a radical break with the rule of capitalism." (p.5)

"As a part of its campaign for a labor party, the Workers Party therefore puts forward from the very beginning a minimum program as its (emphasis in original) proposal for the program that an effective and militant working class party should adopt." (p.6)

The clearly defined lines of this resolution have in general not been followed during the past period, right up to the conference call. Our press did not emphasize Labor Party - Workers' Government, but was all too often just content to say "Please, Please, a Labor Party." When a program was connected with it, it was on the no-strike pledge, Little Steel Formula level. If one may arbitrarily divide the transitional program into "what we want and how to get it," we must admit that Labor Action not only did not answer the latter, but usually not even the former. "What we need is - therefore - (after a long article) a Labor Party. Workers, you should know what you want, and as to how to get it, fill this void in with your own reformist conceptions." It should be pointed out here, (and the resolution itself takes note of it), that the workers at first will tend to interpret even the transitional program in their own (more-or-less reformist) manner.

Rather than trust and hope for episodic improvements, we should lay down our line clearly. I wish to introduce the following resolution for presentation to the coming active workers' conference:

"1) This section of the resolution on the Labor Party should be reprinted in L.A., or at least made available to every comrade.

"2) Concretely, the slogan for a Workers' Government especially shall take its proper place linked to the Labor Party demand."

Dave Corbin

Comrade Shachtman's document for the Active Workers Conference presents as its main point the concept of "cadres".

The presentation of this idea at this time, is in my opinion either useless or definitely harmful.

If by a "cadre party" Max means what we always meant by such a term -- that every member of the revolutionary party should train himself for leadership, etc., then the idea is nothing new and in no way contributes any practical suggestion for improving the activity of the party, which is the purpose of the conference. All it does is preach a sermon -- possibly a necessary one, but in this case, not a very lucid one.

However, if by "cadre" Max is trying to introduce a new idea that within the party there are two or more classes of citizenship, the topmost being the so-called cadres, then the idea is positively harmful and worthy only of the party of Cannon. One can well imagine Cannon propounding such an idea if he were able to originate any idea or theory.

I sincerely hope that this is not the "conception of the revolutionary party, methods of operation, etc. which are specifically its own" of which Max boasts.

Shachtman calls for the formation and consolidation of a basic party cadre. After five years of the W.P.-- with the achievements Shachtman so well describes in his document -- he suddenly finds the basic need for a cadre. Not only is it to be formed after five years, but it must be consolidated. How?? A special button for certain party members, saying "I belong to the Cadre"?

Who is to form this cadre, according to Shachtman:

1. Those whose ideas are based firmly on the fundamental program of the party, not merely on those parts of it which are held in common by another organization, but above all on the fundamental program and traditions of our movement and on those contributions to Marxian theory and revolutionary socialist politics which have been made by us collectively in the past.  
(My emphasis - A.F.)

What is this fundamental program of the party. Most party members were under the impression that agreement with the fundamental program of the party is a condition of membership in the party, and not in a party elite -- the "cadre".

Or maybe M.S. is not referring to the fundamental program of the party but to such contributions to Marxian theory as the "national question, the bureaucratic collectivist state," etc.

In that case does he include Lund, Temple, ~~Johnson~~, Johnson, etc. in his cadre? These comrades disagree on various questions.

It seems to me that Shachtman is trying to utilize the conference in an attempt to put over a political concept with which he will be able in the future to "smite his enemies" wherever they may be.

The truth is we have a "cadre", otherwise we would not have been able to achieve what we have. The problem for our movement is not only to get away from "comrades who spend hours on end bemoaning the state of the world in general and of their branches, local committees, local organizer in particular", but we also must get away from the habit of vague generalization in place of concrete analysis of L.A., recruitment, pamphlets, etc.

The problem is how to enlarge this cadre to give it more effective methods and means of really establishing itself as the revolutionary leadership of the American workingclass.

Al Findlay