

DISCUSSION
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THE NEED
FOR
A WORKERS' PAPER

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THE NEED FOR A WORKERS' PAPER

The pre-convention discussion in Los Angeles has been characterized by a questioning of the purpose of a workers' paper. This has occurred because in this area there are several worker and middle class members who by their silence, their hostility to routines such as factory distributions of NEWS AND LETTERS, by their doubts of whether a small group like ours should continue the financially difficult job of issuing a newspaper written and edited by workers, reveal their uncertainty as to the whole project of a workers' paper.

It must be said out of all fairness to these members and to show the real depths of the problem, that these same members have shown the utmost loyalty to the committee. As one committee members aptly put it, this situation where members pay for the paper and then don't use it, is as difficult to understand as a situation where a woman pays hard cash for a dress and then never wears it.

I don't want to speak for these members. They can and will speak for themselves. But the whole nature of their participation in discussion and activity indicates that what is needed is a thorough thinking through of what we see to be the need for and the purpose of a workers' paper. This will be of value to all in the committees and to anyone else in this country or abroad who are also concerned with this problem.

Here are the subjects I am going to take up:

1. The purpose of NEWS AND LETTERS as seen in the proposed Constitution.
2. Theoretical Foundations of a workers' paper as seen in the draft of the book on Marxism. Under this heading also Marx and Lenin on new forms of organization.
3. Role of a workers' paper and organization as seen in our documents from 1940 to 1950. Also the utilization of the Labor Party slogan in a workers' paper.
4. A consideration of NEWS AND LETTERS and our current problems.

1. Purpose of NEWS AND LETTERS as seen in the proposed Constitution

The Convention has before it for consideration a preliminary draft of a Constitution for the NEWS AND LETTERS editing committees. It is a much needed statement of why we do what we do and what new members are asked to adhere to when they join. In considering this statement, which makes formal that which was previously informal, the Convention in actuality establishes the committees for the first time as a public organization.

The first part of the preamble to the proposed Constitution is a statement of our fundamental belief that the working class is the only force capable of solving the problems raised by this age of state-capitalism. It is a statement of our lack of confidence in the Russian and American systems of society and their political parties to solve the problems they create. This section of the preamble culminates in the proposal to establish NEWS AND LETTERS editing committees for the publication of a bi-monthly newspaper which shall be written and edited by workers.

The next logical stage of the preamble would be to state: we propose to issue this workers' paper because it is necessary that this be done, it is necessary for these and these reasons..., and on the basis of that necessity pose that like minded people participate in the work of the paper. However, the preamble does not do that but says instead, "If the workers take the initiative to form a political party, it is our hope that the accumulated experience and advice expressed in NEWS AND LETTERS may be useful in such an event." (My emphasis)

This formulation is not a serious foundation for our group or for the workers' paper. No worker or no anybody will give heavily of their time, their energy and their funds if the results may possibly be useful if the working class as a whole forms a political party.

This is not only a matter of a few ill chosen words. Our committees have a history of not being able to present adequate reasons for a workers' paper. However, this Convention, with the foundations that have been laid this past year, does have the basis for showing the absolute necessity of a workers' paper and how it will be useful to working people in the course of their struggles with no "ifs," "buts" or "maybe's."

I trust it is clear to all by this time from the little I have already said that this criticism of the proposed Constitution and whatever else I may say here are within a framework of agreement with the political principles of the Constitution and I believe, in fact, are an outgrowth of the acceptance of these political principles. That is why this article is not a resolution or even a statement of disagreement or criticism but an attempt to advance the present discussion on the perspectives for the paper and the committees.

2. The Theoretical Foundations For A Workers' Paper.

How can the need for the workers' paper be seen in the draft of the book on Marxism?

There are two poles to the book. One of them is the specific nature of the workingclass in the age of automation or, putting the same thought in different words, in the age of stratified production or state-capitalism. The other pole or axis of the book is the theoretical insight of Hegel, Marx and Lenin on methods of thought and on what Hegel called the Absolute Idea.

The essence of the book can be expressed simply in political terms. The book establishes definitively that the idea of a radical vanguard party whose function is to lead backward workers no longer corresponds to what is needed or wanted by workers who live in the modern world.

In the early 1900's Lenin stated that the workers' own activity would only lead them to trade union consciousness and that political consciousness must be brought to them by a dedicated political party based on the principles of Marxism. Lenin, in stating this, based himself on the nature of the working class in the specific stage of capitalist organization of production at that time - monopoly capitalism. He believed that under that economic organization of capitalism only a minority of industrial workers would be able to see through the pretenses of capitalism to the need for new human relations and socialism.

Starting from this fundamental conception of the world in which he lived, and it was true about all for his own backward Russia, he formed a party based on the knowledge and aspirations of this minority vanguard of class

conscious industrial workers. His point of view was that this vanguard party would be the best form for crystallizing the thoughts and actions of these advanced workers so that all layers of the oppressed working people could share their insights and effectively act for the new society against Marxist feudalism and developing Russian capitalism.

Lenin did not believe or act upon the basis that political consciousness had to come from outside the workingclass completely. It is only the modern so-called radicals, under the impact of totalitarian capitalist methods of thought, who have twisted Lenin that way to justify their totalitarian parties to dominate over workers. Lenin said: there are layers in the working class itself, these layers are the specific product of this specific monopoly capitalist organization of production and the world, and we Marxist intellectuals link ourselves through a vanguard political party with this particular class conscious layer to bring this political consciousness of the advanced workers to all. His organization, following what Marx had believed and applied before for his times, was not "outside" or over workers but part of them. He knew that the workers would establish their own mass organizations of struggle but he established his party as a form which was part of the process of uniting the oppressed.

The Working Class in the Age of State Capitalism

But today, our book on Marxism establishes, in this age of state capitalism, it is not a vanguard minority of workers but the actual majority who in their daily lives discuss and face the great problems of our time and are prepared to act and solve these problems by a re-organization of the very ways in which men work and live. The solution of social problems in this fashion, by men radically democratizing their own relations with other men right in production and elsewhere is, of course, at the root of Marxism. So another way of putting this thought is that in Lenin's time only an advanced minority were so disciplined by production and their way of life to their own understanding of what we call Marxist theory. Today, however, in this time of automation when workers question the kind of labor they do and are hostile to the very organization of production on capitalist lines, it is the majority whose experiences in production and the world at large are so profound that they come to approximate and parallel the teachings of Marxism in their thoughts and practices.

The task of a workers' organization in our times is different from that of Lenin's time or Marx's time. It is not to crystallize the viewpoint of a minority. Instead its task is to crystallize the viewpoint of the majority against that minority of union, managerial and government bureaucrats who by their control over the trade union movement and the heights of society prevent the majority from establishing the new society.

Hegel's Absolute Idea is the other pole of the book precisely because this great German philosopher foresaw in what he called the Absolute Idea a stage of development where the contradictions of human society would be so apparent to everyone that a human conception of freedom as a solution to the contradictions would come to be the property of the majority instead of the property of a few theoreticians of a small minority.

The book is far beyond the early documents constituting our body of ideas in that those documents, only by simple observation and intuition, reached the knowledge of the differences between the age of monopoly-capitalism and of state-capitalism. The book develops this knowledge not only out of observations.

not only from economic theories but from a total conception of the world embracing all aspects from the Montgomery boycott of the Negroes to the workers' wildcat in the factories to philosophy. NEWS AND LETTERS as the workers' paper played an important part in formulating this total conception as can be seen in the many articles from the paper used in the book to illuminate the ideas. Thus it is that the two poles of the book are related in that automation is the actual world of state-capitalism and Hegel's Absolute Idea is the theoretical anticipation of the workers' thoughts and struggles in this actual world.

The Workers' Paper

It is from this fundamental basis that the need for a workers' paper can be seen today. Modern workers, despite their great insights, are nevertheless isolated from one another. They function as human beings within the framework of an individual factory, an individual neighborhood, a particular city. They know that they and their fellow workers share certain common insights in opposition to that which is presented in their unions, in the newspapers, and by the politicians in the Kremlin and Washington. They don't know or at best can only suspect that their entire class thinks this way. The traditional workers' organization in the United States, the union movement, is so bureaucratized, so tied up with co-operating with capitalist society and production (racketeering is only the most extreme and reprehensible form of this co-operation) that it can not and does not unify the workers so that their knowledge and aspirations can become a force for achieving human rights.

Thus a paper written and edited by workers has the necessary task of bringing the underground thoughts and unknown practices of the workers into the open where they can bind the workers together as a class. The paper shows common problems, how workers on local scales create new forms of organization which can serve as models for national organization and struggle. It is in this manner that the paper logically organizes the theory and practice of the workers so that workers can lead themselves.

The workers' paper thus clarifies workers' politics. It does so essentially for the workers themselves but also to counterpose the workers' method of thought against all other methods. By doing so non-workers can define their attitude and give their support. In the paper women and youth and minority groupings can examine their own problems within the dialectical framework of the workers' method of thought and practice and thereby see their identity with the cause of working people in general.

In the past we have spoken as if the workers themselves organize all the new forms of organization. That is not true. Marx and Lenin took the impulses of advanced workers to organize certain necessary new forms themselves. They did not passively listen and learn from workers. Marx not only wrote Capital, which as a necessary theoretical form educated generations of workers and intellectuals, but organized the First International. Lenin not only expanded Marx's theories on the basis of a new stage of production but organized his Russian party and the Third International as a means of collecting the knowledge of advanced workers into a form that would act on the course of history.

The book shows that Marx and Lenin did their most important theoretical work and established their own contributions as to forms of organization by watching and learning from what workers were doing. From this we can judge how important it is today to penetrate beneath the workers' seeming acceptance of capitalist thought and his apparent passiveness to the fact that the majority of workers are thinking out in their heads and activity the problems they will face in the establishing of the new human relations that they want. And we can

learn from the fact that Marx and Lenin were not just theorists or observers or intellectual anticipators, but creators of forms to crystallize working class thought and activity, that to correctly consider the workers' paper as a new form of organization itself is not in violation of our fundamental belief that workers will build their own mass forms of organization as a result of objective needs.

By examining the nature of modern society the book therefore establishes the need for new forms of organization which give release to the working class desire and ability to reconstruct society. The workers' paper and the editing committees are the forms which correspond in 1956 to the vanguard party form which Lenin established in 1903. It was the great crime of the de-politicalization we went through from 1951 to 1955 that it blocked both the work on the book and this conception of the paper as an actual instrument of the class struggle.

3. Early Thoughts on the Role of the Workers' Organization and Paper.

It is one of the most surprising aspects of the 1951-1955 de-politicalization that we seemingly forgot we had said anything before 1951 on the role of a workers' paper and organization. Presumably the new conception of a workers' paper written and edited by its readers outdated these early thoughts. However, these were the body of ideas that originally brought us together and established us as a workingclass tendency. It is time that we looked at them again to understand our own foundations and to reconcile these foundations with what we are striving for in NEWS AND LETTERS.

Two most important of the many major points of these early documents (1950 through 1950) were:

A. We definitely knew what we didn't want in the way of party theory and organization. We had the economic theory of state-capitalism in opposition to the old organization and we had a little idea of what and how we would do things if we were a public organization.

B. We had a very definite concept of what we then called propaganda and education.

A. What we didn't want.

In the course of years of dispute with the "old radicals" we knew that we didn't want anything to do with their idea that the working class was backward and therefore that the radical party would have to maneuver its way into domination over workers. We knew instinctively that American workers would not accept such domination and the stifling internal life that would necessarily accompany it. We also knew that their doubts that workers would be an effective force for socialism led their parties to eventual support of either Russian or American state-capitalism, particularly in a time of war. Such support would logically lead to these parties calling for workers to give up their struggles for human rights as well as give up established gains in order to help the cause of a particular state-capitalist country. This betrayal of the workers' immediate and historical interests we saw as implicit in all theories and speculations about the backwardness of the working class.

In the course of these disputes our confidence in the ability of workers to reconstruct society without totalitarian leaders was developed and stated. It was this background which eventually led to our acceptance of the idea of a paper

written and edited by workers, even though the foundations which would establish such an activity as a necessity in the class struggle were not known to us at the time. We knew we wanted to break down the separation that had hitherto existed between workers and radicals in the United States and this idea of a paper merely looked like a possible good way to do it.

(It must be said here, at least in passing, that the ideas of the early documents were advanced in a literary manner. While theoretical principles and methods of approach were almost always stated in precise language in terms of necessity, concrete proposals were often advanced in terms of experimentation. In other words while theory was dealt with dialectically, the practical conclusions were viewed and presented as often as not in a manner befitting pragmatists and empiricists. This left room open for subsequent confusion on the relations between workers and intellectuals in the organization and in the class struggle. Thus the early documents, not being based on Hegel's Absolute Idea, left open the crucial question of whether a completely new form of organization was needed in opposition to the idea of a vanguard party or whether a new form of vanguard party was needed.

(It was this confusion which laid the roots for the later conception that the workers would merely "express themselves" in a workers' paper while the intellectual leaders, by paying lip-service to worker leadership, would constitute themselves as the organizers and planners of class activity. It was in the early documents, side by side with profoundly liberating thoughts, that the basis for this new type of domination over workers was laid.

(This duality laid the basis for the de-politicalization of 1951-1955 when the workers in the organization and immediately about were kept busy "expressing" themselves and learning little or nothing about becoming leaders of their class. It also laid the basis for the Johnsonite split of 1955 when they found that the whole organization would not go along with their war-induced panic, their movement to anti-workingclass conceptions, and their imposition of a totalitarian internal regime where intellectuals would openly replace the established worker and Marxist leadership.)

B. Our Early Concept of Propaganda

Believing as they did that workers were backward, the old radical organizations all functioned as small mass parties. They would call for mass actions, the workers were to follow their leadership and when, as usually happened, the workers saw through their false pretensions and did not want their leadership it was another proof to the radicals of how backward American workers really were.

When workers were occasionally recruited to these organizations, they were treated as second class citizens. They were to do the little routine jobs of the organization and maneuver in the trade unions while the intellectual radical leaders would be sitting in their offices planning the routines and the maneuvers. It was a totalitarian duplication within the so-called radical organizations of the division between mental and manual labor characteristic of capitalist society.

As opposed to these practices we put forward the idea that the major task of the small radical groups was to help workers to be their own leaders in the class struggle and in the radical groupings. We said that workers should be educated in Marxism to accomplish this. We said Marxism should be advanced not only in classes but in the whole atmosphere of the organization and particularly through the public press of the organization.

Concrete proposals were made in the documents which dealt with the type of article that should appear in the press to advance the ability of workers to be leaders of their class. There was a recognition that many of the old Marxist classics presented fundamentals from a background that would be intelligible to European workers but difficult for the American worker to grasp. An Americanization of Bolshevism was proposed by which Marxist fundamentals were to be based on the more familiar ground of American experiences.

Proposals were made also as to how the press should propagandistically utilize formulations and slogans relating to general class aims as a means of clarifying workers' politics. This was developed in absolute opposition to the old radical use of slogans as a means of whipping workers into activities that would give the radical party opportunity to assert its leadership and domination over workers.

I believe that these documents which are well known to all of us should be reviewed by the worker-editor of NEWS AND LETTERS as well as by all in the committees to see if and how the specific proposals we made so many years ago can be applied to NEWS AND LETTERS in the next period. Here I want to take up briefly the Labor Party slogan as it was formulated then because the proposed Constitution mentions the subject in passing (and I believe does so incorrectly) and because I believe it can illustrate how any reader of the paper can be made to see the need for and purpose of NEWS AND LETTERS.

Q. The Labor Party Slogan

Our conception has always been that the workers would form their own mass organizations, that no one could predict in advance what these would be, but that some organization would definitely be formed whereby the workers would deal with national and international problems in the struggle for socialism. Regardless of the form, whether it looked like a political party or town and factory committees and councils linked by committees of correspondence or whatever it looked like, this new form of organization would necessarily deal with political problems. We never said then and we have never said in NEWS AND LETTERS either, "If the workers take the initiative to form a political party..." (My emphasis). That is a very bad formulation and subject to all kinds of interpretation. It doesn't belong in the Constitution if for that reason alone.

The old radical organizations call for a political party of labor simply because they see that as an arena where they can develop. They would even negotiate with Reuther or some other union bureaucrat to set up a Labor Party as a new means of domination over workers in the belief that this would at least give them a place to maneuver and some activity to exist upon.

In opposition to this frantic calling for a Labor Party by would-be leaders with no followers, we proposed something entirely different. We said: Let's call for a Labor Party but not to tell Reuther we would help him establish a new means of domination over workers. We proposed the Labor Party slogan not as an opportunistic and agitational call for action but as a means of making clear to workers the purpose of the radical organization itself, to help in the development of workers as leaders of their class and clarifiers of workers' politics, and to make clear to workers we would reach that he had confidence in their ability to build their own organizations.

D. The Labor Party Slogan In The Workers' Paper Today

Apply what was written then to the workers' paper today. By advancing the slogan of Labor Party as we conceived it ten years ago (in editorials; by prominently displaying worker comments on the question - and workers often talk about Labor Party; in the Constitution which should be given to all potential members and frequently reprinted in the paper; in perhaps a special box in each issue) any reader would know that this paper stands for the self-activity of the workers, is against totalitarianism, is against the union bureaucrats and the Communist Party; and has no blueprints or plans aside from a conception that the majority of people in the United States are able to and can establish the necessary new relations among men when they break away from the domination of the union, managerial and government bureaucrats. We would let them know concretely that it is the union bureaucrats specifically who by their present control over workers' relations with each other on a national scale hold the workers back from accomplishing this.

We would let workers know that it is groups of workers from all over the country who have to decide on such questions and that the pages of our paper are open precisely for such discussions on the development of new forms of organization.

We would let them know we are small, do not propose to do any leading and were we larger are based on the principle and practice that workers do the leading.

We could say without hesitation or timidity within the framework of the slogan that we believe nothing would be satisfactory to the workers themselves than an organization that, democratically crystallizing the workers knowledge and aspirations, would be boldly prepared to stand for the very reconstruction of society on human foundations.

We could tell the workers that when, not "if," but when the new form of organization is established and if such an organization does not immediately reflect the will of the people, this newspaper written and edited by workers and open to all layers, would then be the basis for opposing the working class method of thought and practice against all the radicals and bureaucrats who would seek to dominate the will of the people and subvert it.

With such a unifying thread running through issue after issue any reader would know what we were about. There need not be in this any inflation of ourselves to an importance which we do not attain to in practice. We make it clear we are small and are not proposing to lead anything. If we reach 100 workers or 100,000; whether we are 25 or 250 or 2500 this method is the same.

As I see it, and as I believe we all commonly believed and understood so well before 1951, this manner of organizing the introduction of a subject into the paper that is written and edited by workers makes the need for new forms of organization including the workers' paper itself apparent to any readers and last, but not least, for our own members. This proposal is, I believe, in line with the remarks of the national chairman who said at the time of the break with the Johnsonites that our paper logically organizes the thinking and actions of workers, clarifies workers' politics and introduces subjects. "We don't only talk and listen to workers. We introduce subjects to them. We give a logical organization to his instincts, impulses, grips, desires. (Page 11, Conference Bulletin No. 1, April 1955). This proposal of the Labor Party slogan is within that framework, which we have not concretely or consistently worked out in the paper itself.

This is the way I believe the paper can assert its own necessity without in any way violating the form or structure of the paper as it is now set up and without violating a single principle of the committees. There might be dangers in over-extending ourselves in special circumstances but no serious person or group will avoid doing something worthwhile and consistent with his or their principles for fear of unknown pitfalls that, in any case, have to be met as they inevitably appear.

I believe that our early documents, regardless of all faults, give us other guides, other unifying points we can utilize in the paper where it will be clear that even though the mass forms of organization are yet to come, and fast no one can do more than anticipate them, that the workers' paper has a reason for existence now as well as then.

4. NEWS AND LETTERS and its current problems

There is no place in the United States other than NEWS AND LETTERS where workers and non-workers can get such a total picture of the class struggle. Even though the paper is small and in financial difficulties it has accomplished that much - and that is quite an accomplishment. Even the early paper, CORRESPONDENCE, when there was an actual duality of purpose (the Johnsonites subtly advancing the proposal and practice for a new form of vanguard party over workers) and before it became completely transformed from a workers' paper into a literary and vanguardist publication by the people who split from us, accomplished this in large measure.

What CORRESPONDENCE lacked and what NEWS AND LETTERS and its editing committees can now accomplish because the theoretical foundations have been laid is a unifying pole within the paper itself which can make clear to workers and everyone the necessity for such a total picture of the varied aspects of the class struggle. Without such a centralizing pole our paper appears merely as a passive observer and recorder of events instead of an effective weapon in the class struggle. As I started out by saying at the very beginning of this article, it is difficult to see why workers should come to the support of a paper which accumulates experiences in the hope they may be useful.

A. Finances And Numbers

We are suffering not so much from lack of money or members as we are suffering from the de-politicalization resulting from the four years spent in collaboration with the Johnsonites.

Consider the question about our lack of growth and small base for financial support. The numbers actually involved in the production of a workers' paper matter far less than the question of numbers in a vanguard party. We few have actually been able to found and maintain what is unquestionably the workers' paper for many months. We are having difficulties in continuing but the difficulties are not insurmountable. Only de-politicalization leads some to think in terms of numbers and finances exclusively and not to how the paper is and can be further developed as a fundamental contribution toward the workers' consciousness of themselves as a class and toward the creation of worker-leaders around the paper and in the factories.

When we work out in the paper itself (and not through explanatory (i) CORRESPONDENCE PAMPHLETS) the means for showing the necessity of the workers' paper, then we can expect that workers will see the necessity for giving support to such a paper as the objective situation develops and the paper circulates.

Since we say that the workers' paper is the form of organization for this modern world of state-capitalism which corresponds to the form of organization known as the vanguard Marxist party in the past period of monopoly capitalism, then we must meanwhile be prepared to do all that we can to maintain the workers' paper as Lenin and his associates did all to maintain the necessary vanguard party in its difficult years of birth and development between 1903 and 1917.

By approaching our current problems with the need for the workers' paper clear in our minds the problems of lack of support will be solved. It is labor, patience and continued efforts to improve the paper along the lines of the present theoretical foundations that will result in the paper creating for itself a greater base of support.

Sears

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