

INTERNAL BULLETIN

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BUILDING THE BOLSEEVIK PARTY..... J.R. JOENSON

AGAIN: THE THEORY OF UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT .....ARTHUR STEIN

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## BUILDING THE BOLSHEVIK PARTY

1. During the last year the party has shown unmistakable signs of disquiet and uncertainty about its present and future course. Unless this is clarified a serious internal crisis can easily result.

2. During the period of proletarianization a large percentage of the membership has achieved valuable knowledge of the actual class struggle. Our influence as unionists in the union movement, seen in relation to our size, has been effective. Labor Action has had a wide circulation and has been read and appreciated. We have temporarily lost valuable cadres, but the membership, operating under new and trying circumstances, has been devoted and self-sacrificing. Yet all this and hard work has not bred confidence. Uncertainty can be found in all layers of the party.

3. The WP aims at building a Bolshevik Party to lead the social revolution. How far have we progressed in that direction?

For years now the WP's main preoccupation in its policy has been and is union work around such slogans as "Revoke the No-Strike Pledge", "Withdraw the Labor Members from the War Labor Board", etc. In theory it is a Bolshevik party, and like all Bolshevik parties its aim is to function like a revolutionary socialist political body in the union movement. It is not a left trade union organization as can be easily seen from our opposition to the war and our theoretical basis of the antagonism between capital and labor. But our impact upon the workers movement is that of a militant wing of the union movement with a socialist coloration.

4. The present situation is most clearly expressed in Labor Action. There is no doubt about what the paper aims to do. It seeks to agitate the union workers and push them into action on the slogans of the day. It prints predominantly agitational articles which usually end by exhorting the workers to form an Independent Labor Party. Periodically, articles deal with the international situation from a Marxist point of view. But except for sporadic articles or reprints which are obviously aimed at "introducing some socialism" into the paper, the total effect is almost purely agitational.

5. Most of the members are enthusiastic about the popularity of the paper. But at the same time there is a clearly discernible criticism of a more or less ill-defined but genuine character.

Many complain that the WP as a party does not find any place or does not find sufficient place in the paper. One comrade, obviously defensive on the low political level of the paper, makes the revealing remark that "at any rate" any worker who reads Labor Action "gains something." Another criticism is to the effect that the labor news in the paper should be so selected that it is representative of the general situation of labor in the country. There is the perpetual cry from all sides for "more socialism in the paper." Still others complain that the weaknesses of the paper are due to the weaknesses of its editorial staff.

This volume of criticism has grown in recent months, but it continues to be vague and the Editor rightly complains that it is difficult to act upon it concretely, because most of the critics do not seem to know what they want. Of late, however, criticisms are made more concretely in comparison with the Militant and not always to the disadvantage of that paper.

6. The critics have made no headway with this criticism because they do not understand that Labor Action is the type of paper it is because it expresses a certain method of building the Bolshevik Party in the U.S.A. at this stage. If this method is accepted, the great mass of the criticism is pointless. What is the issue here is a politico-organizational question. Clarity on this is the first task of

the party to check confusion and avoid frustration.

7. The present organizational course of the party is based on a certain method of party building. Briefly, it is as follows: The American working class is backward and this backwardness is expressed by the absence of an independent labor party. From this, however, the step is made that it is therefore the present task of the WP to devote itself to raising the level of class consciousness of the workers to the stage where an independent labor party is formed. Thus, the party acts like a small edition of a mass party. The mass party brings masses of workers into action. We attempt to do the same and confine our policies to urging that a mass labor party should be formed. This is the general course of the party and Labor Action is the living embodiment of that course.

## II.

There are at present three political conceptions of party-building in the party. It will clarify matters considerably if they are indicated here in broad outline.

The first is that which accepts wholeheartedly the present course. Lund is most representative of this. His constant preoccupation with the transformation of the WP into a mass party shows this clearly enough. He wishes the present party to conduct itself externally and internally like a small mass party. He thinks that the party has not moved consistently and logically enough in the present direction. His concern with Bolshevism is literary and internal. For him at the present stage Bolshevism is a matter of internal education. Lund's ideas have a following in New York. One member at a recent meeting expressed this most fully with the statement that the party must become more like Labor Action.

Shachtman, on the other hand, considers the present weaknesses due mainly to lack of forces in the field and at the centre, and attributes criticism and doubts to an inability to recognize these facts. But he shares the basic theory of raising class consciousness to the stage of an independent labor party and considers the present Labor Action as an excellent example of the kind of paper needed by the party in the present stage. In my opinion his argument, that those who are dissatisfied are so because they are unable to understand the limitations of forces, is fundamentally incorrect. The party leaders and members thoroughly understand the limitations of forces. It is not a question of different estimation of forces but of different politico-organizational conceptions. These must be clarified and Shachtman cannot clarify Lund and that section of the membership which tends to think like Lund because he holds the same basic promises as they do.\*

After watching that theory in action during the past three years and its results, I have gradually come to the conclusion that it is false, is a serious handicap to the party in its task of building a Bolshevik Party, and must be consciously rejected.

My ideas are expressed tentatively and in a restricted sphere in the document, Education, Propaganda, and Agitation, presented to the October 1944 Plenum. After the plenum it was handed into the National Office for distribution to the membership with whom I had hoped to discuss it. The long delay in its publication has prevented this. The following proposals are predicated upon the general ideas outlined in

\*Shachtman aims at combining a propagandist sheet with the agitational paper. This has become clear too recently to admit of detailed treatment, but the objections are contained in this document by implication.

that document and now more fully developed. From another aspect a similar conclusion was reached by Harry Allen in his document on "The War and the American Workers", also presented to the October 1944 plenum.

The Workers Conference must first of all clarify this question. After a burst of activity followed by uninspiring concrete results the party may once more begin to question itself as to where it is going and tend to follow wholeheartedly the ideas of Lund. That would be a very serious danger for the party.

### III.

a. At the present stage the WP can only be a propaganda organization whose main purpose must be to propagandize socialism and to make socialists. All Marxist parties aim at raising the class consciousness of workers at all times. But to circumscribe the task of the WP by this is Utopian and results in a steady dilution of socialism. The consequence is a growing loss of identity, both external and internal, of the WP as a revolutionary party. Internal education cannot correct this. The day to day impact of the proletariat upon the members in the factories and unions is too strong, especially when fortified by the present character of Labor Action.

b. To propagandize for socialism does not mean any return to literary polemics to members of other parties or the radical intelligentsia. That, as I have explained in the Education document, was one task suited to one period. For us today, the best place to propagandize for socialism is at the point of production and in the mass organizations of labor. Proletarianization must therefore be continued and strengthened both organizationally and ideologically against the disruptive tendencies of the post-war period.

c. But the party must not shirk the fact that the experience of trying to act like a small edition of a mass party during the last three years has cost immense labor and that such concrete results as have been achieved have been far below expectations. The history of the branches will in general prove that. It is this which affects and will increasingly affect the members. The party must therefore reject any conception of acting like a small mass party and reject at the same time the conceptions on which this theory rests.

d. If the party is to become an effective propaganda organization, Labor Action must become a propaganda paper and a paper which aims at recruiting members to the WP by its propaganda. The party must reject the conception that Labor Action is an excellent paper but is not a recruiting agent. It must reject the conception that recruiting to the party is to be done by individual contacting based on pamphlets which take the workers beyond the stage of Labor Action. Propaganda in pamphlets, etc. must supplement but in the modern world cannot substitute for the paper.

e. Labor Action must not propagandize for socialism in general. It must become a socialist paper beginning the long and difficult task of training, politicalizing and recruiting the most advanced elements among the workers in conscious preparation for the socialist revolution in the United States. This requires not agitation on a low level but the Americanization of Bolshevism in the comprehensive sense outlined in the Education document.\* A paper may be written simply and popularly and yet be a paper propagandizing for socialism, the social revolution and the

\*In addition to the practical proposals outlined in that document, I propose to write for the Conference a brief outline for Labor Action writers which would further concretize the Americanization of Bolshevism.

revolutionary party. To write simply in no way implies the watering down of our ideas. It means only to present them simply. But the paper cannot attract and educate the instinctively revolutionary worker and at the same time be an agitational paper of the type that it is. There is no compromising or half-way house between the two conceptions.

f. (i) That the WP become a propaganda party and Labor Action a propaganda paper does not in any way deny or exclude the role of agitation. But the propaganda character of the party and the paper will govern the agitation and not vice versa. If the bulk of the membership continues to work in the factories, life itself and the immediate needs and aims of the workers will find more than adequate expression in the paper. But the day to day work of the members, the daily struggles of the workers and the transitional demands will be presented by the party and its paper in terms of their socialist, i.e. their propagandist significance.

(ii) The idea of a turn to political work in the unions without a corresponding turn in the party press and in the party thinking has been a failure. This is no accident. A consistently successful turn of that type demanded a general turn. Both must go together.

g. The recent turn of the CL, the changes which it has already brought in its agitation and propaganda and the further changes which may develop reinforce the necessity for such a reorientation upon the party.

h. One of the main functions of the party and the paper is to teach, illustrate and in all ways emphasize the role and value of the revolutionary party. This is not only a duty. It ultimately brings rich and direct rewards to the party itself. This can be achieved:

(i) By using all ways and means of bringing constantly before the readers of Labor Action the party's own program.

The paper must present itself (with due regard to all necessary considerations) as the paper of a vanguard party seeking to train and attract members and sympathizers of a vanguard party. The vanguard, however, recognizing the stage of development of the masses, consciously propagandizes for an Independent Labor Party. This should be the guide to the work of the party in the unions and the axis on which the activity of the whole party should revolve.

(ii) In this period the party must make the instinctively revolutionary worker party conscious by the most unremitting, scrupulous and able analysis of working class movements in Europe, Asia and Africa, and, above all, with reference to the policies of the groups which stand on the basis of the Fourth International. If the party is opposed to the political line of these groupings, then in the paper it must oppose them vigorously. But to neglect these movements is not only to fail in our revolutionary duty but to disorient the party and to lose the best of contemporary opportunities to bring home to militant American workers the strategy and tactics of revolutionary struggle.\*

(iii) The party must educate itself and the readers of its propaganda and agitation in the essentials of Bolshevism both for its own development and particularly to challenge the Cannonite exposition: "In Defense of Marxism," "History of Trotskyism in the United States", etc.\*

j. The party must begin the task of transforming itself and consciously discarding the errors of the past few years. The development of our membership as a truly

\*This by no means implies long articles in every issue.

Bolshevik cadre cannot on the present basis be very successful. With the bulk of the members in the factories and unions, the party will feel the day to day impact of immediate needs very powerfully. As long as this continues, too little agitation will never be our weakness. The danger is the opposite. The party will be caught between the theory and practice of the present Labor Action and the attempt to build Bolshevik cadres. Neither will be successful and ultimately both will suffer. This does not mean that the party will not gain some members. In the coming period most parties will gain. But the gains will be inadequate and the confusion will increase.

(k) The party will be able to recruit:

(i) by individual contacting of Labor Action readers who will be made party-conscious by the paper.

(ii) The party, however, must understand that the transformation of the propaganda group into a mass party takes place only by transitional stages as a result of a developing relation between the party and the labor movement. (See Lenin: Selected Works, Vol. iii, New Tasks and New Forces, p. 431)

It is not excluded that the party can double or treble itself "in six months," or even get a membership of 1000 (Lund). But it cannot do these things as it chooses. The fruition of the party's propagandistic activity in terms of recruits comes most notably at critical stages and breaking-points in the objective development of the working-class. To characterize the coming period in the U.S. as one of social crisis is to envisage "feverish and explosive" mass actions and corresponding changes of consciousness. If the propagandist party keeps contact with the masses, if it confidently bases itself upon revolutionary perspectives, if it educates the workers as to the real meaning and significance of events, then it will be able to make substantial and sometimes astonishing progress on the road of transforming itself (a) to the stage of agitation and (b) to the party of action. These stages cannot be arbitrarily combined. (Education document, p. 25)

#### IV.

With this orientation clear in the minds of the party membership, it will be possible to place on the order of the day the transformation of Labor Action into a six page paper. But the changes which are proposed above, if handled with the necessary judgment, are not dependent upon the greater size of the paper.

J.R. JOHNSON

June 29, 1945

Again: The Theory of Uneven Development  
An Attempt to Analyze the Failures of the MCF, ALP, etc.

There are certain theoretical aspects regarding the political future of American workers which, I feel, should be discussed at this time.

Compared to Europe and Canada, American workers stand, politically, on the lowest level of immaturity. Never in this country has a class-conscious labor party achieved anything even resembling the workers' political support of the capitalist parties. Whereas in Europe and in Canada, the concept of a society without capitalism -- socialism -- enjoys an almost universal support among the workers, American workers, with equal near-unanimity, favor the "system of free enterprise." There has been a sufficient abundance of capitalist crumbs in this country to prevent a wide-spread working class acceptance of the socialist ideology. The tradition of American Workers, though militant in pure-and-simple trade union struggles, is, above all, one of ideological non-acceptance of social change. The (to Marxists) obvious political significance of the militant American labor history (I am thinking, for now, mainly of the industrial organization drives of the CIO), has never been recognized by any substantial section of the American proletariat. -- The enormous one-time importance of the "non-political", even self-styled "anti-political" militant IWW is the most symbolic exposition of my point.

For these reasons, the relationship between Bolsheviks and the working class as a whole has been fundamentally different here from what it has been in other countries. In order to bridge the gap separating the Marxist revolutionary vanguard from the rest of the workers, our comrades in Europe can use the common desire for socialism as their starting point in leading the workers to state power. A similar propagandist slant, by the way, is clearly indicated today in Canada, where socialism is consciously desired by a majority of the working class. In the socialist reformist labor parties in Europe, and in the socialist CCF in Canada, we utilize and begin with the popular socialist consciousness. On the other hand, in America we utilize and build our activities around the American trade-union militancy, with the purpose of clearing the political and revolutionary socialist implications of this militancy in the minds of the workers. To express it in a formula (and realizing the dangers of any such formula, especially when taken out of context), while our main tasks in Europe consist in teaching revolutionary methods to match the socialist consciousness, our main tasks in America consist in teaching a socialist consciousness to match revolutionary methods.

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Thus, the American workers, from a point of view of political consciousness, are far behind their brothers in other countries. But the peculiar development of American capitalism

will soon place upon American workers the responsibility of acting as a revolutionary class -- without the benefit of decades of socialist political experience. In sharp distinction to the conditions surrounding the birth of working class politics in Europe, the political history of American workers will have its start when capitalism is in the very last stages of its death agony. In a period of capitalist youth, capitalist liberalism, and capitalist progress, the socialist ideology, lacking the urgent immediate acuteness of today, naturally took reformist forms. And due to a tragic cultural lag, European workers have never completely freed themselves from these reformist illusions. But when the political activities of the workers have their beginnings in a period of capitalist decline and the broadest and most violent economic struggles imaginable, as they will in America, there are no grounds upon which reformist illusions can form.

In this sense, the political poverty of American labor history will be an asset. Never having had a political movement, American workers have no socialist reformist illusions to overcome. They will, in my opinion, skip the stage of a mass reformist party. In its stead, I foresee the rapid mushroom growth of the revolutionary organization.

May, 1945

Arthur Stein