

Steuben Challenge Shows Changed Methods in Party Activities

By HARRY HAYWOOD (Chicago)

John Steuben's challenge to the section organizers to recruit 20 new members to the Communist Party by the time of the national convention clearly reflects the change which is taking place in our conception of the character of the work of our section organizers. In other words, this challenge comes from an actual understanding of the role of the section organizer not as an office man but as an outstanding figure and a genuine political influence, a real leader and organizer in his community. If section organizers throughout the country accept the challenge and seriously attempt to carry through this proposal it will help to orientate them towards their real tasks indicated by the new tactical line of the Communist Party.

Past Work

My formal acceptance of this challenge, therefore, comes after due consideration of the whole field of possibilities for recruitment and of the tasks of our Party on the South Side of Chicago at the present time. This means an analysis of our experiences in the united front in the recent past and a clear conception of our political perspectives in this connection must be worked out, in order for us to be able to say exactly what expectation we can have for recruiting by the Party membership in general and particularly by section functionaries.

By our experiences in united fronts to date we can judge the character and extent of our contact with the people of the South Side. In the united front we can register certain advances. The struggle against the high cost of living brought together on the South Side the first large group of people for united action against high prices and the sales tax. The campaign for the defense of Ethiopia started on a broad united front basis and brought in a number of outstanding leaders on the South Side, and led to the demonstration on Aug. 31, which proved conclusively that popular interest was aroused, that the masses of people are ready and anxious to support the struggle for their economic and political needs, and was a great step toward breaking the pessimism which had been observed among certain sections of the Party membership. The isolation of the

Party was smashed not only in the direction of the masses of workers but also on the side of the middle-classes who were aroused by the police brutality into protest and active participation in the Committee for the Aid of Ethiopia. This same united front on the Ethiopian issue was continued on a broader basis in the Chicago Society for the Aid of Ethiopia which was recently able to bring together some outstanding leaders and organizations among the Negro people, hold a mass meeting for Lij Zaphiro, Ethiopian representative. This meeting was attended by 4,000 people.

The united front of a similarly broad character has also been formed around the issue for freedom for Herndon and has led to the arrangement of large mass meetings and to the establishment of the struggle on a broad mass base. Likewise the work for a cultural center on the South Side with various cultural organizations participating, including the International Workers Order, drew new groups together to work for the development of Negro culture.

Overcoming Sectarianism

These movements have not been sufficiently consolidated, however, as to bring out their greatest possibilities, because the Party did not sufficiently combine this work with the struggle against sectarianism and the education of the party membership in the spirit of the united front. This meant that at the beginning our united front activities were in the main confined to the leading comrades of the section with the Party membership insufficiently involved.

Self-satisfied sectarianism has had deep roots in our section. It took the form of a certain timidity and even resistance on the part of a considerable number of our Party members to working in reformist organizations and particularly in the churches.

The causes of this sectarianism are to be found in the whole development of the Party on the South Side during the mass upheavals of 1931 and 1932 which were followed by a recession from the position as the leader of mass struggles for immediate needs of the Negro toilers because new situations were not met with new tactics and new methods of work. Events after the launching of the New Deal and subsequent popular illusions called for alertness in

STATEMENT OF HUDSON COUNTY (N. J.) SECTION ORGANIZER

As an example of how mass recruiting can be done, I will recruit fifty Party members by the time of the Ninth Communist Party National Convention, or one for each worker recruited by the rest of the section membership.

In order to do this, I have relieved myself of 75 per cent of the inner Party Meetings to which I have been compelled to give attention until now.

To set free the energy of the section organizer and other leading comrades, it will be necessary to strengthen the machinery of the inner Party organization and to develop real collective leadership. Weekly consultations, therefore, will be held with all unit organizers. Further, the section executive committee has apportioned fuller organizational responsibility among all section executive committee members. A list of five new party members who must be developed in leading work has also been drawn up.

I recommend, in order to assist Party members to find time for recruiting, that at each unit meeting a system be established to relieve a certain number of comrades of the unit of all routine work for that week. This work of the members specially elected as "recruiters" shall be taken over for that week voluntarily by other members of the unit. In this way we can be assured that ALL Party members will carry on recruiting. This does not mean that during the rest of the month, all others shall feel relieved of the duty of recruiting. This method is merely proposed as an added stimulus to intensify recruiting. Further, those members so selected shall carry on recruiting among specially selected workers through methods decided upon by the unit, among which can be newspaper and literature distribution, etc.

In order to carry out my pledge of fifty members I have in mind definite organizational perspectives in organizing new units and new shop nuclei. In order to fulfill these organizational objectives, lists of forty and twenty workers who are progressive, in three shops, have been made up. Among these workers I will carry on that type of work best calculated to win them, such as Sunday Worker routes, sale and distribution of literature, constant personal contact with the best of them.

I will gladly agree to assist any Party member in this task of recruiting, by carrying on work among his prospects with him, these prospects to go to the credit of the Party member whom I have helped.

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finding new issues around which the masses could be mobilized for struggle and the greatest flexibility in adopting their traditional modes of organization and struggle in the work of our Party. Instead, there was an inclination to consider that mass demonstrations and picket lines were the sole means of actual struggle for the demands of the Negro people.

Individual Mistakes

Consequently when the toilers failed to respond to our continuous appeals for mass action, demonstrations organized over night consisting mainly of unemployed workers, the conclusion was drawn by many of our Party members that the workers won't fight—they are not hungry enough. There consequently developed a tendency

to further withdraw from the workers and their organizations, to lost contact with them completely, and a tendency to substitute revolutionary phrase-mongering for patient day-to-day work among the masses and their organizations.

Comrade D. R. Poindexter was particularly loud in his accusations that the section was "pursuing a right-wing line" and he strove to justify this sectarianism by an "I-told-you-so" attitude towards the treachery of the Rev. J. C. Austin who boited the united front and launched a slanderous attack against it at its most crucial stage. This attitude received a decisive rebuttal recently at a tri-section membership meeting at which our tasks in the coming period were discussed, when the membership rallied closer to the leadership of

the Party and the new tactical line of the Communist International.

National Negro Congress

The membership is absorbing the lessons of its united front experiences guided by the line of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International and is being drawn more and more into united front activity. The result is a new spirit in the units. The big new ward units are divided into squads which are being sent into work in churches, Parent-Teachers Associations, Republican and Democratic clubs and so forth. In the course of all this the prestige of our leaders increases. Results for me personally have been a widening circle of acquaintances with non-Party persons among whom I am confident there are a number who could be recruited into the Party. We must learn to make the most of this prestige not only for effecting contacts for united front struggles but in addition to build the Daily Worker and to build our Party.

In this connection I must speak particularly of the effects already to be felt from the work so far in preparation for the National Negro Congress. Here we can see most vividly the essential change in our technique, the new forms which our work must take as the struggle for Negro liberation progresses on the South Side and nationally.

Trade Union Committee

Preparations for the National Negro Congress locally have been a unifying force in the affairs on the South Side and have done much towards bringing Negroes and their organizations together for concerted action on a minimum program for Negro rights and represents a beginning of a real People's Front in the Negro field.

As a specific instance: in the trade unions our perspective has been the building of a Labor Committee (similar to the one in Harlem) which will unite various Negro and mixed local on the South Side behind our program of unionization of Negro workers and the strengthening of the fight against discriminatory practices in the A. F. of L. Without the Congress this would be a slow and tedious progress, but already in two weeks the Trade Union Committee of the Congress has been able to bring together representatives of many trade union locals, including the important unions on the South

Side. They are discussing the question of serious consideration of the unionization problem in the Congress and in addition the problem of reaching other locals for delegates. It is clear that in the Congress the basis will be laid for a broad Labor Committee which will be a tremendous aid in bringing the trade union movement to Negroes on the South Side.

Work With Youth

Then again, the Young Communist League has had difficulties in effecting a real broad united front among the Negro youth. Up until the movement for the Congress was launched, only the most progressive sections of the Negro youth could be aroused to any consistent struggle for their needs. Why was this? Because we did not develop forms which the Negro youth could accept as their own; scope for their initiative, stimulus to activity were lacking in our sectarian approach. However, the youth movement in connection with the National Negro Congress is shown, locally to be the form which the Negro youth will accept as their own. The youth leaders and their clubs, churches, Y.M.C.A.'s and so forth are rapidly being drawn together by the Youth Committee of the Congress. The youth are actively working for the Congress. This movement certainly will not stop at the Congress but will lead to something permanent.

The leaders of the movement for the Aid of Ethiopia are coming into the local Congress movement and will no doubt lead to the strengthening and broadening of the work in defense of Ethiopia as time goes on. Besides strengthening existent relationships, the Congress has acted as a unifying factor in making it possible to reach clubs and individuals who formerly held aloof but are now coming into the movement.

All these circumstances enforce the conclusion that our work in the coming months must proceed further along this line to the energetic work to recruit from these new progressive forces as many Party members as possible.

It must be our aim to see that all such united front activities in which the Party is involved are connected up with the building of the Communist Party.

I therefore accept the challenge of Comrade Steuben and urge all section organizers to do likewise.