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EDUCATION, PROPAGANDA, AGITATION  
POST-WAR AMERICA AND BOLSHEVISM

PART 1. The General Problem of the Trotskyite Movement

We have found it necessary to make the main item on the plenum agenda the organisational question. The cause is a widespread recognition of the fact that after three years of grinding work in the factories the recruiting of new members has not only been far below expectations but from all appearances is likely to continue so. The idea that the lag in recruiting is due to the unorganized, unsystematic methods of the members has been more or less discarded. It was not a serious contribution to the question. What we are facing now and will increasingly face is the whole problem of building the mass Bolshevik party in the U.S.A. The war in Europe is coming rapidly to an end and the whole country is aware of the tremendous social conflicts which the post-war will bring. The building of a mass party to lead the proletariat is for us the problem. This is the question I propose to discuss here, but from one aspect only, the aspect of education, propaganda and agitation. There are others equally important. I do not propose to deal with them here.

First of all I have to make clear what is not being done in this document.

I am not dealing with the general problem of how a party is built.

I am not touching at all upon mass trade union work except insofar as this affects or is affected by education, propaganda and agitation.

I am not dealing with the objective situation in America except insofar as it is impossible to discuss propaganda and agitation in a vacuum.

With this limitation constantly borne in mind, we can and must remind ourselves of what we are in general attempting to do. All studies of dialectic, of historical materialism, of political economy, of the history of the working class and of the revolutionary movement are for the most part meaningless if they do not concretely contribute to and culminate in the theoretical analysis of party-building. The plain fact, too often forgotten or ignored, is that in the past fifty years only one effective Bolshevik party has been built in any of the great countries of Europe and America and for that matter anywhere. The Communist Parties from their very first days were inspired and nurtured, theoretically, organizationally, and morally by Soviet Russia. From that same source they drew their early corruption. As we look back at the catastrophes they caused, their totalitarian opposition to the simplest and most elementary doctrines of Leninism, particularly in China and Germany, it is clear that whatever was responsible these parties were Bolshevik in name only. In the last decade and a half, except in the remote and undecisive outpost of Ceylon, the Trotskyite revolutionary movement has known nothing but failure.\* Great events have come and gone. We have made no impact on them. At times, as in France between 1934 and 1936, our theory attracted widespread notice. Solid bourgeois papers devoted articles to Trotskyism as the real danger. At the Mulhouse conference of the Social-Democracy in 1935 our comrades led a powerful opposition to Blum. But we could do nothing effective. The great events passed us by. There is no reason at

Britain is a special case which will be specially dealt with at another time.

all why great events should not develop during the next few years and find us equally ineffective, left behind as before, calling other groups and parties centrist, (as we justifiably called the POUM), reformist, Stalinist or what not, but ourselves insignificant. There is no reason for believing that with the inevitable revolutionary upsurge of the masses, we must automatically grow until we become a large party. There was a great revolution in Spain. Every party in Spain, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary, grew except the Trotskyites. As we enter the post-war period, we, as serious Marxists, must analyze these things and try to draw some lessons.

OUR EXPERIENCES, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL

One indispensable way of doing this is by the thorough and systematic analysis of the experiences of the Trotskyist movement as a whole. This is no light task. But it is time to begin. I propose to begin as simply as possible, with the experiences of the W.P. during its four years of existence, particularly the last two. In 1942, the party, taking conscious advantage of the national development, made a great step by incorporating itself into the broad workers movement. This was a development of fundamental importance. No party, no group can grow and develop unless the majority of its members function and function intelligently among the workers in industry. Everything that is said here is conditioned on that. Members became immersed in union activity. The party agitation and propaganda, as was inevitable and necessary, underwent a change. LABOR ACTION became a paper whose main emphasis was the activity of the workers in the union. At the same time we developed a practice of mass distribution, and half a dozen comrades would distribute thousands of copies weekly. It is not clear what was concretely expected from these distributions. We have at least the results to go by. In one area our comrades have taken an active and effective part in union work. They have distributed between a quarter and a half million pieces of literature among the workers. Yet the results in recruiting have been practically zero. Perhaps we now have gained three members, perhaps five. This is not what the party expected. The party expected other results. It is possible that there may yet be some. It is also possible that within a year and a half the comrades in question would be unemployed, or back at remaining in the same barren activity. If this were to take place the great effort and the great expectations will peter out. This calls, if anything ever did, for serious examination not only by the leadership but by the whole party.

One theoretical explanation could be that the American workingclass, during the period of war, was not ready to join a revolutionary party even in small numbers. If this is so, then the party must recognize the fact. We attempted the impossible. The results, such as they have been, are only what could have been expected, or at least what we now see to have been inevitable. This view has not hitherto been advanced in the party.

Or it is possible to say, on the other hand, that the workers were ready to make some appreciable organizational response to us (not perhaps in thousands yet something corresponding to our efforts) but that the main failure was due to faulty party methods. If that is so, then the party as a whole bears the responsibility. No one advanced any important and concrete alternative course of action. The great value of the course we took is that it was tried out by every one or at least nearly everyone, more or less wholeheartedly. It is therefore impossible for any one to say "Had we done otherwise, the results would have been different". This writer at any rate is saying nothing of the kind. If, however, we agree that we did the best pos-

sible under the circumstances, that does not settle the question for the future. The party has now forecast for the coming years a period of social crisis in the United States. This can be variously interpreted. In the NEW INTERNAZIONAL and in the Internal Bulletin I have written articles which express my particular emphasis on the future development of the American working class. Soon to be freed from the restraints of the European war, and with the great experiences of 1939-1944 to help it, it now faces a political development which, when it comes, will in all reasonable probability be as violent and all-embracing as was the industrial development of the CIO a few years ago. That some millions of workers may vote for Dewey would not alter the basic movement -- that may even accelerate it. The whole international and national situation are conditioning substantial sections to receive extreme revolutionary agitation and propaganda. As far as it is humanly possible to see, any failure on our part over the next few years will rest squarely with the party itself. That is the way the question must be posed. If, in the next few years, there is a great social crisis; great actions by the masses (for without that there is no social crisis) and the party still remains a few hundred or at best continues to be so insignificant as to be unable to stamp itself upon the national consciousness, then the question of responsibility for failure becomes philosophical, if not academic. We have to recruit sufficient members to become an effective revolutionary party. It is in the light of this that our own recent past acquires special significance.

What then were we trying to do ?

To put it briefly we were conducting ourselves in propaganda and agitation as if we were already that mass party which we hope to become. To have 75% of our membership in the unions did not transform us into a mass party. We became a propagandist sect in the unions. That is all. And a propagandist sect, however active in the union, is not a mass party. For this reason, ten members of the C.P. could distribute 10,000 copies of the Sunday Worker in any area and confidently hope to reap results. Their paper has behind it the international power and prestige of a great modern state. The party is nationally recognized. In various spheres its actions materially affect the wages and working conditions and political life of large bodies of workers. Periodically, its nationally known speakers can visit the area and capitalize on such a mass distribution policy. It can, at a given time, throw in organizers and pull its contacts together by activity and special concentration on the area in the pages of the paper. All that was and is entirely beyond our strength. And will be for some time. Except where a union situation is hot, we are physically incapable of reaping the just reward of such mass distributions. How can ten comrades handle 6000 readers for a paper or even 600? We raised the political level of some thousands of workers in general. But we did not gain any substantial number of recruits that way and cannot.

The proof of this can be seen in reverse by what took place in Mo. There we could actually affect the lives of the workers. Since the strike in 1942, every field worker in Missouri works ten hours a day and then goes home. Nothing will make him work longer. Local 313 and the Trotskyites have the credit for this. Mass distributions in the area build on a concrete foundation. At any time we are ready; dozens of recruits are waiting for us. But elsewhere that is for us impossible. Any continuation of this policy in the same form can only result in wasted effort and frustration. Finally we have gained some positions in industry. But the positions gained were the result of a high level of employment. We face in time mass unemployment. The party most improbably can avoid the consequences of this. The question could not seriously be judged at the convention in January. But we may be faced with the possibilities of a return to concentration on the personal

contact method of making recruits. This is the policy followed by the Cannonites, it is said, with good results. But the question is not by any means exhausted by mass distribution or concentration on personal contacts.

Our turn to the masses, correct, legitimate and indispensable, brought with it a particular form of agitation. We lacked the national and international drawing power of a mass party, like the C.P. Yet in LABOR ACTION which became our main weapon, we did not concretely tell these thousands of workers what they could not learn in any other way or from any other source. What a party is, why it should exist, what has been the past of such parties, why the reader should consider that all that we did and he read must culminate soon in joining the party - that was conspicuously from the paper. Except for a pamphlet by Lund, there is not one single piece of propagandist literature to do this recruiting job. We did not even produce a pamphlet saying what the Workers Party is about. Thus neither inside the paper nor outside of it were the mass distributions concretized. It would be a very low level of discussion which tried to prove that this was due to "lack of forces". It was a colossal mistake and nowhere so much as from the point of view of recruiting. This we must probe to its roots or we shall never correct the mistake in the way it will have to be corrected.

#### LABOR ACTION As A Recruiting Agent

The present LABOR ACTION must be the foundation of the further development of the party. There can be no return to the old Militant or the SOCIALIST APPEAL both for reasons which are well recognized by most of the members of the party and for others which will be apparent from the rest of this document. First of all, it is necessary to dispose of the broad criticism that LABOR ACTION is a left-wing trade union paper. That is not only false but unless it is disposed of in the proper way, it is so easily replied to that it prevents that analysis of the paper which is necessary. LABOR ACTION is no left-wing trade union paper. The paper is politically opposed to the capitalist system and the capitalist class as no left-wing trade union paper can be unless it is based on Marxism. To take one example. The theoretical opposition to the war is completely beyond any left-wing trade union paper that this writer has ever heard of. No left-wing trade union paper has the theoretical base of our political articles. In all these essential respects LA is a Marxist and not a trade union paper. Furthermore, its union coverage is equally based on the concept of class. And if the party were a nationally known party the paper as it is would be a powerful recruiting weapon. This is not a question of whether readers know that it is the paper of the Workers Party. If the paper said this in every issue on every page, it would not help matters. A reader of the paper would gather that the union question was of paramount importance. He would learn, somewhat abstractly, that labor in general should form a Labor Party. But he would read the paper for one year and get no coherent knowledge of what the Second International was and why, of the history and development of the Third International. Most important of the historical development of the American working class, of its past, present, and future of what the working class stood for historically as against capitalist society, of that he would learn very little. Not only would he not learn this in general, but he would not learn the relationship of the revolutionary Marxist party to the class. He would never know what a revolutionary party was, why one should exist, what was its purpose, aims and methods, why it was an imperative necessity, what was its relation to the Labor Party and, above all, why he as an advanced worker should get into contact with it. So that even if he knew that the paper was the paper of the Workers Party, it is impossible to see how he would learn all the things that is necessary for him



to make him into ripe material for Bolshevism. It is the lack of all this in the paper, not only explicitly but implicitly, which gives rise to the criticism that LABOR ACTION is a left-wing trade union paper. To attempt to meet this criticism by saying that the critics want to go back to the old Militant is what has to be rooted out of all our discussion.

Let us clarify the discussion at once. One good pamphlet and six months of reading LA should lead a substantial number of readers of LA a long way towards joining us. It is possible that a dozen such pamphlets and a reorganized LABOR ACTION would not have helped us in the past. It is possible that a reasonable section of the paper devoted specifically to educating American readers for American Bolshevism, would have left us where we are now. It is possible. But this much is certain. Unless in this field there is a drastic reorientation, from top to bottom, not only of the paper but of the party, we may gain a few members, double our membership, even treble it in two or three years. But we shall fail completely to move organizationally with the necessities of the times. That is what we have to do, not grow in general, but grow in a certain proportion and anything else is failure.

The objective circumstances of the American working class and of the W.P. demand now that we get away completely from the idea of recruiting one by one or two by two. We may have to do that for a time, and in one sense we shall always be doing that. But the world we live in makes it imperative for us to concentrate all our best energies into making the paper an agent for the training and recruiting of conscious Marxists. This is a historical necessity, rooted in the development of modern civilization itself. Anyone who thinks that today, 1944, in the United States, and during the next few years, recruiting is merely a matter of personal contact, "highly organized" is living in 1917. Today the whole organization of society is moving rapidly towards mass collective action on a grand scale. Workers in any numbers are repelled from small insignificant groups. The perspectives of one-by-one building up of a party to have effect in ten or twenty years have little sense to a worker in a country where organized labor is 14 million strong, and the NAACP has half a million members. Further, social and political developments are accelerated not only in space but in time. A new political organization issues at one stroke millions of pamphlets, the political leaders address the nation and the world by radio and are seen by the nation on the screen. Labor union make special film shorts of their own. The PAC sprang up overnight. This is the age we live in. We haven't the resources to begin these things. But to us our popular press is not what ISKRA was to the early Bolsheviks. They did not have to contend against the technical facilities of the Bourgeoisie, that we have to contend with and the collective social consciousness corresponding to it. The odds against humble proletarian beginnings like ISKRA and LABOR ACTION have lengthened enormously. LABOR ACTION becomes our press, our radio, our plans, and our film shorts. We have to make it into something which with the necessary backing, will preach, win recruits and adherents far beyond our limited personal contact. The personal contact and the mass meeting must merely be the concluding stroke to what pamphlets and LA have already done. The paper must carry such a message that as the social crisis develops, on the Eastern seaboard and the Middle West at any rate, the idea should gradually crystallize among thousands of readers, most of them unknown to us, that this paper should become a daily paper. The present writer believes that the American working class does not need its combativity stimulated. Any such approach on our part in particular, is not only ridiculous but presumptuous. Neither need there be any fear that the working class will not create mass political organizations. Without any assistance from LABOR ACTION or the Bolsheviks, these are going to come with a violence and range which, as usual, will astonish nobody more than the radicals themselves.

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The whole history of labor and of labor in this country is indicative of the fact that what the American working class needs is the theory and practice of Bolshevism; That is what it needs, and that is what it can get only from us. This is what we have to translate into the paper. This is what the paper lacks and it does not lack it by accident or lack of forces.

LABOR ACTION is what it is because the paper is based on a certain theory. The theory is that the American working class is not class conscious to a sufficient degree. Our business in the paper therefore is to try to raise the masses to the next stage. That stage is to make them ready for an independent labor party. When the stage is reached, the workers will then be ready for revolutionary Marxist propaganda. So that at present we are doing the best that can possibly be done. At the same time, however, on this theory and with a paper corresponding to it, we act as if we expect workers to join the revolutionary Marxist party. This is the contradiction in which the Party finds itself, in regard to LABOR ACTION and recruiting.

First of all the idea that the general level of consciousness of a working class movement forbids the strong and vigorous teaching of Marxism contrary to the whole theory and practice of the Marxist movement for a hundred years. Without going into that now, there is the experience of America itself during the last fifty years. Before 1914 there was the general popular agitation for socialism of Jack London and later of Upton Sinclair. This found a wide response among vast numbers of people. But, in addition, there was the strictly Marxist propaganda and agitation of the Socialist Labor Party and the American Socialist Party. Both of these in their various ways were Socialists and Marxists speaking directly to the American workers. Such deficiencies as they had are to be explained by the fact that theoretically they were based more or less on the general standards and ideas of the European Social Democracy. The SLP in particular not only taught Marxism but also indulged in mass industrial work.

Secondly, they had definitive successes building from the ground up. Can any one say that today the American working class is less class conscious than was the working class which those pioneers addressed so boldly and so consciously? The mere existence of the CIO is proof enough if proof is needed of the tremendous stage of development which the American working class has reached in comparison to the days of World War I. Not only are the workers organized industrially as a class. Despite the absence of an independent labor party, the American working class is living an intense political life in the American and "One World" of today. It has had experience of capitalist crisis in its most horrible form, of two imperialist wars and has seen organized labor grow to be an actual and recognized social force. There has been brought home to it the political consciousness of Fascism, of proletarian revolutions in Europe, of the possibilities of barbarism, the contradiction to be solved between the potentialities of the productive system and the social needs of the masses of the people. All this exists today as potential material which did not exist in the days of the SLP and the SP. Under the circumstances what reason is there for believing that on the basis of the mass trade union work and its coverage in the paper we cannot speak boldly and directly for what we stand for, Marxian socialists seeking to build a revolutionary party in the name of scientific socialism? If we see it, we will do it.

#### OUR INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

LABOR ACTION is not an accident. It is as it is, virtues and faults, a part of the international Trotskyist movement. It represents a stage in its development. Many of the newer comrades discuss the paper and our movement with no knowledge of what they are talking about. These questions however must

be dealt with comprehensively. Lenin insisted that the problems of party building should be discussed not only among the leaders and the intellectuals, but in the press before the workers. He himself set a noble example. Let us at least begin by discussing them among ourselves with the necessary material and background.

We must see, first, the international scene in which the Trotskyite movement functioned under Trotsky and what he was trying to do from 1928 until his death in 1940.

In Europe between 1919 and 1944, with perhaps one exception, no proletarian party of any strength at all emerged independently from the proletariat. The SAP in Germany, the Independent Labor Party, the Dutch Party led by Peter Schmitt, all were splits from the mass Social Democratic Party. Secondly, these splits were led by men who were already well-established as leaders in the Social Democratic Party. From the beginning, Trotsky who directed the Trotskyite movement was pretty clear as to the general situation and what it demanded. His conceptions may be divided into three periods, 1929-1934, 1934-1938, 1938-on. Each period had a separate aim and separate method. During the first period, Trotsky conceived of us as a fraction of the Communist Party. We aimed at reintegration into an already existing mass revolutionary international organization. Our whole propaganda and agitation aimed mainly at winning over people who understood what we were driving at. Vanguard spoke to vanguard. We were trained for that purpose and with that aim. Criticisms of the press of those days may be legitimate, but if they do not bear that in mind, they are not only useless but misleading. We did not have to make our main burden of explanation what Socialism or Bolshevism was. We operated within the framework of a false Bolshevism which we proposed to correct.

This policy was changed in 1934 with the "French Turn" and we broadened our aim. We had now as our main objective the left-wing of the Social Democracy in Europe; in particular, this was and is a highly politicalized grouping. It more often than not had sympathetic and even intellectual affiliations with Communism and Communist Parties. It understood broadly what the problems and conflicts were about. Trotsky, aware of the urgency of the situation, aimed at splitting off substantial sections of these radicalized workers to become the nuclei of mass parties. That also was a specialized target for our activities. It was only in 1938 that that policy more or less came to an end everywhere. In 1938, the Fourth International was launched to stand on its own feet. The results are highly instructive. Except in Belgium where there was a proletarian basis in the Borinage the various European parties failed to make progress. The most notorious failure was in France where the P.O.I. had been established as an independent party in 1936.

Now it is important for us today to note that the American party in as totally different environment followed exactly the same course as the European Trotskyite parties. From 1928-1934 it aimed mainly at the Communist Party and was trained for so doing. From 1936-8 it aimed at the American Socialist Party, a party which in comparison with the European Social-Democratic parties was and is like a Swiss group of boy-scouts in comparison with the German army. However, some gains were made more than in Europe, and in 1938, the SWP followed the international course of the Trotskyite movement and faced the

\* These phenomena are to be generally explained by the capacity of capitalism to maintain illusions in the proletariat during this period. The question, though germane, it is impossible to treat here. I am merely dealing with the necessity of getting some perspective of Trotskyism and party building.

American masses as an independent organization. Thus, in the ten years of its existence, in its agitation, propaganda, education, it had been a "European" party, aiming at the same specialized groups as the European parties. In the period 1928-38 this had not been of much importance. But when the American party faced the prospect of addressing the American workers, the different stages of development of American and European at once assumed importance. The politically educated grouping in Europe, a potential soil for Trotskyism, did not and do not exist in the United States on the scale that they do in Europe. In America the split from the S.W.P. came too early for any definitive conclusions to be drawn, but apart from the Russian question, there was already in the S.W.P., in 1939, a deep conviction that the party was going nowhere "under Cannon's leadership." Burnham, whose background was not in the least Trotskyite, had already begun a steady orientation towards the American scene. But Burnham was no Bolshevik and did this empirically. By the time the W.P. had organized itself, the approach of war engendered the movement into factories. The W.P. leadership seized hold of this tendency and organized it. A radical break was made in the turn to the masses. Trotsky had seen and prepared for this turn theoretically. That was the significance of the Transitional Program. In practice however, we had failed to make this turn. It was not until the October convention of 1941 of the W.P. that the turn was definitively made in the United States on the basis of the impulse given by the war. Once we recognize, however, the historical differences between the various periods we can say that the organization of this turn by the W.P. was one of the best things that had been done in the Trotskyite movement in the United States of America.

This time the break was made practically. Trotsky had given us the general international theory of the Transitional Program. But from a theoretical and national point of view we made the break empirically, and it has produced all the vices of empiricism. There was not worked out consciously a new political ideology of a general kind, no political orientation for education, propaganda and agitation. In the previous periods we had a theoretical basis, amply worked out. There was socialism in a single country; there was the whole Russian question; there was the question of the Stalinist deviation from the Bolshevik struggle against the imperialist war, there was the Chinese Revolution, German Fascism, the Popular Front in France, the Spanish question (which produced a lengthy pamphlet by Morrow), the Moscow Trials. These were our theoretical stock-in-trade from 1928-38. In those we lived and thought and had our being. But with the turn to the masses these have been more or less abandoned except insofar as we make the barely necessary adaptations. But otherwise we live in what may be reasonably described as a sort of theoretical vacuum. In Europe today that is not so. Many of the old problems still remain and are for them urgent. But the theoretical accompaniment of the specific turn that we have made simply does not exist.

That is why the party talks of education but does nothing about it.

That is why Labor Action is as it is.

That is why the party as a whole while very satisfied with the paper in general yet feels that something more is needed.

That is why resolutions are passed for more socialism in the paper and nothing is done. The translation of Bolshevism, of Marxism into terms suitable for broad masses of the American people proceeds, if at all, empirically and without any conscious plan. And this deficiency on our part we rationalize into a theory that the American masses must reach the stage of being class conscious before they are ready to accept the doctrines of scientific socialism. This is not only contrary to the experience of previous Marxist



organizations in the United States. We cannot say that because we have not made the attempt. It must be repeated and repeated over and over again; we were not trying to do this in the best days of the old Trotskyite movement. All such comparisons can serve only to mislead us.

Are we building an American party?

Look at the list of books advertised by Labor Action Book Service. It is in 1944 a curiosity. There is a book by Rochester "Lenin on the Agrarian Question," Simons has an old pamphlet "Class Struggle in America," Shachtman has a 5¢ pamphlet on Cost-Plus, Gates one on Incentive Pay, and Lund a 10¢ pamphlet on Plenty for All. For the rest, it is Marx to Kugelmann, Lenin on the Threatening Catastrophe, Trotsky on Whither France, Plekhanov on Anarchism and Socialism, Kautsky on Ethics and Mearns on the British General Strike, and some sixty volumes of the same type. The NEW INTERNATIONAL is today a reflection and a very poor reflection of the books on this list (that I shall deal with later). But that is where we stand. To believe that we can build a mass party on such fare is a mistake, I repeat. I am not prepared to say that if there had been a change here in 1942-44, we would have recruited numbers of workers. But I say without any reservations whatever that unless there is a planned, systematic, methodical but drastic attempt at reorientation, the social crisis will pass us by. LABOR ACTION is, therefore, a paper of a party which has made a sharp turn to the American masses with the intention of building an American party from the ground up. But the theoretical equipment of the party is the "European" theoretical equipment which was the common heritage of the Trotskyite movement worked out over the past dozen years.

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Our Problem

This is our problem. If it is not there, there is no problem and all we have to do is to go on working in the unions and hope for the best, blaming history if we do not succeed.

Let it be said at once that the orientation which we began in 1942 must be continued. Propagandist sect though we are (and any group which cannot effectively move masses in its own name, is a propaganda sect) our place is in the union movement with the great masses. One of the great weaknesses of the European Trotskyite movement was that it would not get to the masses at the point of production but functioned among them, where it did, almost exclusively in the mass political organizations of the masses in the United States. Still more important, and this is a historical development of profound socialist significance, even before World War II, there was noticeable a powerful tendency towards drawing together of the trade union and political organizations of the workers. In the U.S., this most capitalistic of all countries, this hitherto European tendency seems likely to attain its completest development. Inside the union movement, the American working class is living the intense political life of the times and the American political movement is likely to be tied to the union movement from the very start in an indissoluble bond. Thus, in the U.S., in particular, our place is in the union movement as the basis for our political action.

Secondly, in the next stage there must be no basic change in attitude towards the CP or any other party at present on the horizon. The CP today offers us an example of a party that is supremely well-educated for its own purposes. It can hold a meeting with 18,000 people in one month, opposing the imperialist war and have the same people the next month supporting it. This is neither miracle nor stupidity. The party is educated with the preservation of the Soviet Union as its basis. These actions and changes are therefore perfectly intelligible to the members and sympathizers. A party like ours will waste its time trying to break through that. Furthermore we shall attract other parties by strength. Our road continues to be the American workers. Our aim continues to be to lay the foundations of a mass party from the ground up.

Here let us get the word "mass" right. A mass paper in ordinary terms is a paper which moves masses. Any organization which can publish such a paper educates and attracts not only by concrete action but by the means that its size and strength places at its disposal. But we have to define our terms carefully. If we distribute 25,000 copies a week, then we are meeting, for us, masses. Furthermore our whole orientation now in the paper is not towards the advanced few or even those politically educated workers who form the left-wing of a European Social-Democracy. We today, on an extremely narrow base, are attempting to educate and draw together a few thousand workers whom we expect to be driven toward revolutionary perspectives by the developing social crisis and our education. It is a very highly specialized situation; a country ripe for socialism, a working class in a highly charged and explosive national and international situation, but without even the education that is given by the political practice of a mass reformist

party. Finally, there is another party, the Communist Party, representing Bolshevism in the eyes of the masses, pushing them as hard as it can back into bourgeois-democratic illusions, perverting and distorting all the fundamentals of Marxism and skimming off the cream of the revolutionary workers as they emerge from the broad masses. These are the conditions under which we work, and everyone of them merely intensifies the importance of LABOR ACTION as a paper teaching Marxism to the American workers.

It must be understood at once that changing LABOR ACTION is no work of a day or of a year. No cure-all is being proposed, no list of articles and people to write them or columns in the press by qualified persons, no technical solutions to "solve" the party problem. It is a problem of a long-range policy, to be discussed inside and outside the party, a tentative plan systematically and methodically worked out by trial and error but with a clear consciousness of the aim. Some of these ideas I have placed very briefly before the Political Committee nearly a year ago. Others which will follow I sketched also in outline at a city-wide meeting preparatory to the last convention which discussed the American scene.

#### PART II. The Americanization of Bolshevism

To Bolshevize America it is necessary to Americanize Bolshevism. It is time to begin. But we do not begin by writing some articles in L.A. about the Bolshevik and Menshevik struggle in 1903, trying to make the readers "party-minded" by describing what our five comrades in X did or the seven in Y nearly did. No. We begin by getting a theoretical orientation and basis. Nothing can be more misleading than the idea that Americanization means seeking historical examples of revolutionary American parties and American heroes of labor with which to "inspire" the American workers and season our journalists.

Every great revolution is a truly national revolution, in that it represents not only the historic but the immediate interests of the nation and is recognized as such. But every party which leads such a revolution is also a national party rooted in the economic and social life, history and traditions of the nation. Its own class ideology is cast in the national mould and is an integral part of the national social structure. In my article on Sidney Hook (signed AAB, July, October 1943 N.I.) I tried to show how truly Russian and national was Lenin the greatest internationalist of the age. The Bolshevik Party was the same. And we shall see, it was so from its very beginning.

The W.P. is not that. It is a long, long way from that. It has got to turn its head in that direction. A huge task if ever there was one, calling for theoretical and practical energy of a high order.

As usual, our only model is Lenin, the leader of the only effective Bolshevik party which history has known, and like the one we aim at, built from the ground up.

Lenin spent six years in preparation for his task, mastering the volumes of Capital that had appeared; Anti-Duhring, etc. He arrived in Petersburg in 1894 and from that time to 1914 his life's work was to translate Marxism into Russian terms for the Russian

people. The Russian revolutionary movement had a long tradition behind it, Herzen, Belinsky, Chernyshovsky, men famous in the revolutionary movement and in Russian literature as a whole. Lenin took care to build on that tradition. His method of doing so was to do for his generation what they did for theirs, teaching Marxism to the Social-Democratic Party and the Russian people in spacious terms. Here is a rough summary of his work.

(1) The most thorough exposition of theoretical Historical Materialism that exists is his long reply to Narodnik falsification of Marxist theory. In Vol. XI of his Selected Works, extracts from this study fill nearly 200 pages. It is dated 1894, is probably his first major work, is couched in Russian terms and is unsurpassed to this day.

(2) His controversy with the Narodniki on the future development of Russian capitalism fills volumes. In the course of it, he made contributions to the analysis of CAPITAL which remain for the most part unknown and far less understood in Western Europe and America. Yet it was Marxism applied strictly to the Russian economy.

(3) He wrote THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAPITALISM IN RUSSIA, a book of many hundreds of pages. It was a direct application of the most abstract Marxian economy theory to Russia.

(4) His work on party building, WHAT IS TO BE DONE is Russian in conception and execution, Marxist classic though it is.

(5) His special work on the Agrarian Question in Russia stands alone. It is a masterpiece of Marxism, but on Russia.

(6) His study of American agriculture, made in 1913, is a unique masterpiece. He did it specially to illustrate certain aspects of the problem of Russian agriculture.

It is on this that the Russian Social-Democratic movement lived. These were the theoretical and propagandist foundations of the party. This was the work that guided the agitational press of Bolshevism. The Bolshevik Party was rooted in the day-to-day work, in industrial and mass struggles to a degree compared to which our modest efforts can claim comparison only in good intentions. Only an armor-plated ignorance could think of the Bolshevik leader as anything else but an advocate of mass activity. But as a leader he considered it his special task to provide those thousands of party leaders, propagandists and agitators with material and method by which they could educate themselves and others. In this way, as Trotsky says, he also educated himself. This was no work of an exile. It began from the day he came to Petersburg, writing leaflets about conditions in a factory, reading CAPITAL to small circles of Russian workmen. In his propagandist work he was nakedly, unashamedly, and belligerently theoretical. In his study of the development of CAPITAL in Russia, he prefixed an essay on Marx's economic theory so as not to have to refer to the theory too often in the text, which nevertheless is packed with quotations from CAPITAL. This was the Leninist method. It is the only method for building a Bolshevik party. It is the only way to combat bourgeois ideology. It was necessary in Russia fifty years ago, where large sections of the population were



permeated by hostility to Tsarism and the existing regime and where a long line of great writers had influenced and developed the revolutionary tradition. Furthermore, in the nineties Marxism swept Russia. Marxist books were best-sellers. Compare the modern United States, the most bourgeois country in the world where the workers are permeated with bourgeois ideology. Isn't it clear that we today need to begin this work? Isn't it clear that without it the party cannot even begin to become a mass American Party? How ridiculous it would have been if Lenin had been told that the articles about unions in the ISKRA were teaching the Russian workers Marxism.

And we?

Let the reader now look at the list of pamphlets, brochures, etc. published by the Pioneer Publishers in the old days, from the DRAFT PROGRAM OF THE COMMINTERN, GERMANY WHAT NEXT, THE CHINESE REVOLUTION, THE SPANISH REVOLUTION IN DANGER, WHITHER FRANCE, etc. etc. and the corresponding articles in the New International. That was one period, one party, aiming at one group of workers and contacts. We have made a big turn to the masses. But in our theoretical conceptions and our practice, how vast is the difference! The great danger is that we shall just say "Well, let X write a pamphlet, or Y write two. Then when we get some more forces we shall write some more." That approach is false to the core, empirical, superficial and a positive obstacle in the progress and development of the party. We shall not get very far that way.

#### AMERICAN OR NOTHING

The more we consider this question the more we can see the special character of the problem with which we are faced in the United States.

The classics of Marxism are European in origin and content. They require more than an ordinary knowledge of European history and particularly by an American worker. In the 1928-36 days it did not matter much where we began with the Communist Party members and the radicals. Today when we have to give a class or a piece of literature to a contact, we begin perhaps with the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO. For us who aim at becoming a mass party, this in five cases out of six is anomalous and will increasingly become so. Every European worker of today who reads the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO with his European experiences, his school studies and the daily life around him, social, political, literary and artistic, at once experiences a tremendous illumination that has solid concrete associations. A French worker who reads CLASS STRUGGLES IN FRANCE, THE 18TH BRUMAIRE or THE CIVIL WAR IN FRANCE; a German worker who reads REVOLUTION AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION, or THE PEASANT WAR IN GERMANY, finds the history of his own country made significant for him as never before. CAPITAL is not only a study of abstract capitalism. It is the history of English capitalist development and there is no finer introduction to the history of Great Britain. The last section on Primitive Accumulation is the historical garment of the logical capitalistic development of Western Europe. For the average American worker these books as a beginning are alien. Doubtless if he reads one he is impressed with its power and brilliance and learns something. But what they cannot

give to him in sufficient measure is that sense of reality of the development of his own country, that feeling that in addition to the daily class struggle, he is part of something beyond himself that is the beginning of theoretical Bolshevism and the rejection of bourgeois ideology. Such historical data, knowledge, general reading, social experiences as he has, the structure in which his theoretical experiences must grow are American. We have to begin now, not to write a few pamphlets but to build up the American counterparts of the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, THE EIGHTEENTH BRUMAIRE, and perhaps even more important, the American counterpart of WHAT IS TO BE DONE. We do not wait until we become a large party to do these things. This is the way to prepare ourselves and all our supporters for the gaining of forces and the building of the revolutionary party. If in time among our efforts, we can manage at last to get one such solid pamphlet that does for United States history or the development of the labor movement or any such topic what these pamphlets do for Europe, and catch some of their spirit, we have the possibility, not only of immediate response but, in time, of reaching an ever-widening circle of concrete rewards. This is precisely what Lenin set out to do with a grandeur, breadth and vision that are astonishing even after years of familiarity. In every field he posed proletarian ideology against bourgeois ideology. It is impossible to build an American mass party with our propaganda consisting of Marx on France and Germany, Lenin on Russia and Trotsky on Stalinism and Spain, supplemented by the present LABOR ACTION. It is impossible for a number of average workers to become Bolsheviks unless on the basis of some systematic penetration into American development. Good Stalinists, yes. Good Trotskyites in the old days - the very old days? Perhaps but today, for what we are doing, NO. That is the first point. The second is less easy to grasp but more important in the long run. For the implications of this orientation go much deeper. Not only do raw workers need this Americanization. The party members from the highest to the lowest need it also. No one has any serious grasp of Marxism, can handle the doctrine or teach it unless he is, in accordance with his capabilities and opportunities, an exponent of it in relation to the social life and development around him. The dialectical progression, the various stages of development, the relation between the economic basis and the superstructure, history, economics and philosophy, all the principles and doctrines of Marxism were evolved from a profound and gigantic study by its founders of European history, of European politics, of European literature, of European philosophy. The principles have universal application. But to the extent that the conditions from which they were drawn are not familiar to the Marxists, they remain to a greater or less degree abstract, with infinite potentialities for confusion and mischief. Either the would-be Marxist must have some serious knowledge of European history in its broadest sense, constantly renewed, amplified and developed, or the principles of the doctrine must have been incorporated, worked over, and made to live again in a study of the economic structure, social development, history, literature and life of the country with which he has been many years familiar. Only then is he on the road to becoming a serious exponent and contributor to the doctrine. In fact and in truth only until one has dug the principles of Marxism for himself out of his own familiar surroundings and their historical past, that the Marxism of Marx and Engels, Lenin or Trotsky and the

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famous European Marxists truly stand out in their universal application. Not only is this so: It would be a miracle if it were not so. Not only is it so for analysis, for propaganda or for agitation. It is, abstracted from the question of personality, the basis of Socialist confidence and Bolshevik morale. The Bolshevik solidity which must be the core of those who may come to us, the capacity to stand all pressures, must be rooted in a deep, rich, wide concept of American development. The masses may not need it. But for the party cadres of this period it is imperative. To the degree that we can teach this to masses, we develop and reinforce the hostility to American bourgeois society which is the objective result of capitalism in this stage of its development. Proletarian ideology is not merely a matter of theoretical analysis. It is the weapon and armory with which we must arm and surround the American working class and particularly those who face the enormous tasks confronting us in the present period. Unless it is rooted in the American environment and in such terms as the American worker can grasp, we cannot lift them above the instinctive class struggle, sharp as that will inevitably become. Isn't this what Lenin meant by the socialist consciousness which the party carries to the working class?

#### THE PROOF IS IN THE PRACTICE

If the above is a representation of the actual situation and the needs of the time, then a careful examination of ourselves must show not only the lack but the movement towards repairing it. The party is small and it is not difficult to get some idea of along what lines the members think. Since the birth of the Workers Party we have had two conventions. The first was in 1941 and was concerned mainly with the new orientation towards factories. The members felt that here at last was a change from the 1928-38 activity. The membership, the older membership in particular, was sceptical of talk and promises. It wanted results. The high point of the convention was the appearance of the comrades from Missouri. It created enthusiasm and produced on the spot a substantial sum. The appearance of these workers symbolized the direct contact with the proletariat which was the aim and need of our movement. We met again in convention two years later. Once more the convention was moved to a spontaneous demonstration, this time by the document by Lund on the very question that is dealt with here. When conventions of revolutionaries behave in that way they express deep-going currents not only in the party but in the working class movement. The thing is to analyse them and see their significance.

First of all, it is obvious that in its title Lund's document has little in common with the ideas presented here. He seems to think that it is a problem of attitude, of journalistic method, of seeking "inspiration". But it is to Lund's credit that he sees the problem and has at least found time to give one exemplification of what he means in the pamphlet "Plenty for All". For once a problem is seen at all, it is usually acted upon, whatever the difficulties.

Yet the significance of the convention demonstration was that it reflected the needs of members who were in industry, were concerned with the progress of the party in industry and were looking for ways and means to build the party deeper into industry and reap rewards in industry. In this respect the convention merely carried to its

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conclusion a sentiment which had been confused but clear enough at the Cleveland Conference of Active Workers.

It is now possible to summarize the party development in the minds and actions of the membership.

1. The new industrial orientation is and must remain the life-blood of the party.

2. The new LABOR ACTION is a vast improvement on the old Trotskyite papers. (Not for the reasons usually given, as I have insisted all through this document but because we are attempting what they never attempted. Losing sight of this distinction is part of the reason for our weakness.) The new type of paper that Labor Action is must form the basis and the substantial basis of any proposed orientation.

3. But at the same time the members recognize that something more is needed. This is the perpetual cry for "more Socialism in the paper".

4. Clearly allied with the above is the demand for more education. The membership is deeply aware of the necessity of being educated, and it must be remembered that this membership is grappling with the problem of the American working class and that therefore its conception of education is not abstract theories but of education to make it more competent for the tasks in which it is engaged.

5. The membership feels (a) that it is time that the party began to recruit more members; (b) that it is difficult to integrate the raw workers whom we get into the existing party.

Such has been the development of the Workers Party. But as we watch this development we can see that, small as we are, we are merely reflecting in a conscious and creative manner, as befits revolutionaries, the development of the American working class itself.

After the first outburst which resulted in the formation of the CIO we had a temporary lull. But with the capitalist preparation for the European war the American working class has been driven towards the expansion and the recognition of the social importance of organized labor. In the American press in general and in the literature issued by labor we find this rapidly growing consciousness of the importance of American labor as a force in American society. With this growth we have an increasing consciousness on the part of labor that something more is needed than the industrial struggle, a consciousness that is reflected in the P.A.C. Finally, all over the country and most noticeably among the soldiers in the army there is the growing consciousness that more education is needed, not merely education for a better job, but specifically knowledge of American history and knowledge of the world abroad in order that they may understand the vast social developments of the time.

Thus, when the members say that we want more "socialism" in the paper and more education and must find a way of integrating raw workers into the kind of party that we are, they are demanding some theoretical orientation, material, and atmosphere which will assist them



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to supplement the work which they are doing among the American masses. Since 1940 the party leaders agree on this at all plenums, conventions and conferences. Yet we remain apparently impotent. Everyone recognizes that articles about the happy life to come in the future socialist America are nonsensical. More is needed. But what, that is the question.

The reason for this is that the problem has not been seen in its full scope and depth. This, then, is the essence of the question.

Every principle and practice of Bolshevism has to be translated into American terms. Historical materialism, the Marxian economic analysis, the role of the party, the relation between democracy and socialism, the relation between the trade union and the party, reformists and revolution, the role of Social-Democracy, the theory of the state, the inevitability of socialism, every single one of these can be taught, developed, demonstrated from the American economic, social and political development. The American Revolution, the Civil War, the Knights of Labor, the Populist Movement, the Southern economy, the tremendous history of the CIO; the development of the two major parties; the political and social contributions of Paine, Jefferson, the Wilson Administration, the New Deal, the NRA, the American dollar civilization, the rise and decline of the American Socialist Party, Eugene Debs, John L. Lewis, the Marxist analysis of all this is the material of our education, of our propaganda, of the creation of a Bolshevism which will break a path for us to the American masses. The ideas and principles of Marxism must be boldly and uncompromisingly presented to the American workers. The great European classics must be used, not only for their own sake, but as a means of explaining the American development. With such a party, we shall not only be able to educate our members and give to those with whom we come in contact what they will increasingly be looking for. On the basis of our mass work, when they come to us, they will be able to feel that they belong to us. This is not only a necessary and imperative supplement to our work. It is our special contribution to the American labor movement. The two complement each other to complete what is known as scientific socialism. If one aspect is ignored, neglected or superficially dealt with, then the other assumes an unchecked momentum of its own and does not even bring the rewards which the efforts lead us to expect.

### PART III: THE NEW INTERNATIONAL

I am proposing no immediate cure-all, no patent medicine to bring immediate results. Revolutionary parties are not built that way. They are built by hard thinking and hard work, and hard thinking comes first. Therefore, at the center of the proposed reorientation must be the NEW INTERNATIONAL, the theoretical journal of the party. The transformation of LABOR ACTION into a direct recruiting agent, to recruit in accordance with the necessities of the time, and the reorientation of a mass propaganda must begin with the journal. We have to see, therefore, what it was, what it is, and what it must be. The journal is now ten years old, and, in accordance with the methods used herein and the ideas expressed, we must see it in the light of the historical development of the Trotskyite movement.

Between 1934 and 1938, it was a powerful and influential organ. From a strictly journalistic point of view its editing was always slipshod, but it always had the first necessity of a magazine, one strong central current and in its later years, one minor one. The central current was Trotsky's writings on the international situation, and particularly, though not mainly, on the Russian question. Inside and outside of the paper he wrote with a regard for method, a comprehensiveness of knowledge and experience and a tenacity of purpose which formed the intellectual and often the editorial axes of the paper. From various parts of the world comrades who wanted to write found ideas, information, hints and indications which could be worked up; often even phrases which could be borrowed. Not only articles, speeches, courses drew from that inexhaustible source. To write a pamphlet was simplicity itself. A whole volume of 450 pages was written mainly on Trotsky's writings as basis (*World Revolution*), Isaac's *THE CHINESE REVOLUTION* directly and indirectly came from Trotsky. It is fashionable today to say that we merely repeated his views. That is true and had its weaknesses. The present writer, however, can try to sum up what he is trying to say about the period in which we live in terms of his own experience of the 1928-38 period. When he joined the movement he found a body of ideas, a mass of pamphlets and brochures, one incomparable masterpiece, the *HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION*, with its valuable appendices, soon another volume, *THE REVOLUTION BETRAYED*, and a constant stream of articles, all written with a certain purpose, with the highest integrity and seriousness, with not an atom of empiricism or writing down. One went forth to do the particular battle of those days confident and fully armed. That was the source of the strength of the *NEW INTERNATIONAL*. If, in the next two years, for our purposes today we do one-quarter as well and our people can read and educate themselves on our material in the way we did on Trotsky's, then half our battle is won and with that, on the one hand, and our mass work on the other, *LABOR ACTION* and the individual member will be forces to be reckoned with.

Trotsky also wrote and inspired articles on general topics; such as the introduction to the *COMMUNIST MANIFESTO*, published in South Africa; an article on Engels; a general article on literature which appeared in *PARTISAN REVIEW*. He inspired directly other articles. It is to be noted that Trotsky never wrote a single article on the United States. His introduction to *LIVING THOUGHTS* is a very broad application of the theory of Marx to familiar statistics and other phenomena of U. S. capitalism. He never wrote on the Negro question. He said that he did not have the material necessary although he had a mass of documents, memoranda, statistical material etc. sent to him by comrades and friends. His special field was (1) the exposition of the principles of the First Four Congresses and (2) Russia.

For the period, for the audience we aimed at, it was exactly what was required, despite whatever criticisms may be made in detail. This and the work it inspired made the magazine and trained writers and propagandists.

The second trend, a minor one but nevertheless distinctive enough to be noted, was Burnham's writings on the American question. They were a new departure, consistently done and distinctive in the *NEW INTERNATIONAL*. MacDonald, a first-class journalist, typically Ameri-

can, and Novack, with a real interest in and some knowledge of American history, showed possibilities.

Trotsky might not write about certain problems. He was keenly aware of them for he knew how parties are built. He inspired Novack to write on the Civil War, he insisted that Burnham answer Max Eastman, he continually and even impatiently asked for articles on dialectical materialism. But these were subordinate to the main general line--the exposition of the principles of the First Four Congresses.

In 1940 came the split. And since that time the magazine has steadily declined.\* It lost Trotsky, the source of theory and ideas. It lost Burnham, Macdonald and Novack, who, despite all their weaknesses, formed an American team who complemented each other. But worse of all, it lost a sense of direction. For a time it was difficult enough to fill its pages, but even now when there is too much material it is impossible to work out what the magazine is aiming at in theoretical education. An analysis of articles is here and at this time out of place. But to this writer, the magazine at present seems to be organized on the following basis:

1. as an organ whose main purpose is attacking the Cannonites.\*\*

Articles, editorials, archives, before the convention and after, seems preoccupied with the proving of a case--in narrow terms. In particular, there are reprinted archives from all periods which very few readers are able to place in context. For these to be of real value, these would require still more mountains of material as annotation.

2. exposure of the aims of Stalinism in Europe, done in concrete agitational terms by warning that Russia plans to rule over labor, etc, etc.

3. continuation in the Archives of the old Trotsky-Stalin controversy.

4. an assortment of articles on varied subjects in which it is impossible to discover any orientation.

This is no question of "lack of forces". Forces fill the magazine now. What is happening to the NI is precisely what is happening to LA. In the theoretical field. But LA has the indispensable solid contact with the American working class. They give to it a central direction by their course of action. Its weakness is neglect of an empirical treatment of Bolshevism. The NI, however, lacking this direction, merely represents a feeble continuation from the period 1928-1938.\*\*\*

\* Nowhere in this document am I dealing with more fundamental questions such as the rightness or wrongness of the views of theories presented. That does not alter the line of argument here.

\*\* And not forgetting the "Johnsonites".

\*\*\* This is no mere "destructive" criticism. For the past year or so, the present writer has attempted to introduce into the paper at least one consistent trend along the lines of this document. I list the

Everyone knows what LABOR ACTION is trying to do. Who can say what the NEW INTERNATIONAL is trying to do? Whatever is the aim of the magazine, it is not succeeding. At a time when we represent Marxism, when society is in such crisis that all types of theories are being eagerly discussed by all sorts of people, the magazine as an intellectual force counts for little. To deny this is to dig one's head in the sand.

Polemic the magazine must have. Bolshevism and Lenin in particular lived on polemic. The Cannonites are a legitimate target, and there are times when we have to throw all our weight into breaking them up. But we have had a long experience in these attacks and polemics, and maneuvers aimed at other parties, large and small. The concrete results have been usually in the long run pretty poor.

The most perfect example of what the NI is can be seen in what we produced for the ten years anniversary number. An anniversary number sums up the past, looks at the present situation, from a height so to speak, and opens up the perspectives of the future. It is a number which usually brings renewed interest and enthusiasm and a substantial number of subscribers. It is a number of which many extra copies should be printed and handed out as a card of introduction, so to speak for years to come. Every reader of LA should have felt that this was a number to get, to read and to keep. Instead the number was a particularly bad example of what the NI has been for the past two years, with some 25 pages devoted to the National Question and speeches and articles by Lenin and Trotsky and Engels. Gates continues a polemic on his conception of the party. The result could have been expected. The issue has fallen flat. The wider circles it should have reached are not only untouched - even party members, if one can judge by incidental comments, have been cold where they have not disapproved.

This is on the positive side so far as it is positive. However, it is when we look at what the party is today and what it is trying to do, that we can see how far LA represents one period and the NI another. Between LA and the mass approach to the American worker and the NI, there is an almost impossible gulf.

#### WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

The first thing to recognize is that the magazine's main business is to do in theory what LA (and the non-existent popular pamphlets) must do in practice. The central direction of the paper must be to

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 following articles:  
 "The Philosophy of History and Necessity," NI, July & Oct. 1943  
 "Negroes in the Civil War: Their role in the 2nd American Revolution," Dec. 1943  
 "In the American Tradition: The Working-Class Movement in Perspective," NI, Nov. 1943  
 "In the International Tradition: American Labor's Tasks," NI, Jan. 44  
 "Laski, St. Paul and Stalin," NI, June 1944  
 "The American People in One World: An Essay in Dialectical Materialism," July, 1944, NI



Marxism and the United States as the central directive of the old NI was the First Four Congresses and the International situation. With our background and with the international situation, we need never fear that the magazine will become an example of Marxist "isolationism". Our framework will always be international. At times the international aspect will predominate. Lenin was the greatest of all internationalists. But Trotsky notes that Lenin's "international period" began only in 1914. If it is true that we live in a period far more internationally united than forty years ago, yet the fact remains that once we have for the moment abandoned our preoccupation with the Communist Party and the others, genuine internationalism must be based on the national scene. To repeat ad nauseam. The Theoretical journal of 1928-38 had one aim. We have another. We must from all angles train ourselves for that. No party was ever so internationally trained as the Bolshevik Party. But this most international of all parties learnt Marxism on a Russian basis, and could not have learnt it in any other way. If the NI is not the place where we must train ourselves to do and do what Lenin did between 1896 and 1914, then where must it be done?

If it is urged that during the war we had a special responsibility then that responsibility is now over. France and Italy are already active. The coming period demands a reorientation of the paper.

Not only is this necessary from a national point of view but from an international. America occupies a peculiar place in international affairs today. Knowledge of this country has never formed more than a cursory part of European culture and education. In all probability the number of English universities in 1939 which gave a course in U.S. history and culture could be counted on the fingers of one hand or at most two. Today that is changed. America is the center of world attention. It is the last hope for imperialism and the old democracy. The American bourgeoisie is going to flood the world with accounts of this country, its history, its development, its politics, its ideals, etc. In the present writer's opinion substantial sections of the European bourgeoisie and certainly the "Social-Democrats" and liberals have no hope of salvation except in actual American overlordship or the American "ideal". As long as Roosevelt and Stalin collaborate, the whole power of Stalinism will be directed to supplementing the propagandistic efforts of the American bourgeoisie. Powerful in Europe, this trend will be overwhelming in the Far East. And even where in foreign countries there is an opposition to this trend, the opposition will of necessity concern itself with the United States. The theoretical interpretation of the United States, its past, present and future, becomes therefore a truly international task, a part of the international struggle for socialism and the national independence of oppressed peoples. And in this, the central issue of our times, we have an exhaustive role to play.

Finally, as always in periods of crisis and never so much as in this one, the whole problem of the destiny of humanity is raised. The individual, the state, education, culture, religion, the elite, the necessity of rulers and ruled, race, all these fundamental questions are once more in the melting pot, nationally and internationally. Our contribution in this most capitalistic of all countries is to analyze these fundamental questions in our terms. This is our contribution to the international socialist debate. Marxists of each country do their

own, as internationalists. Henceforth we can be certain that the European comrades will create an international journal, at least in French. Our business is internationalism with the United States as the center. We shall reprint and comment, and also contribute as we have done in the past. But henceforth the paper must know where it is going and all of us must know. I have indicated my view.

#### A THEORETICAL JOURNAL

This obviously is no light task. Marx and Engels knew Western Europe inside out. Lenin and Trotsky were masters of all aspects of Russia. We have to do the same here. The task is not light. Neither was Lenin's task light in those days of 1894. But, a young man in his twenties, he wrote and circulated manuscripts in St. Petersburg which were written as if he were already leader of a state theoretically founded on Marxism. In every field he proclaimed the supremacy and the necessity of Marxist theory. What we have to do is not only to educate concretely. We have to train a generation which will familiarize itself with the fundamentals of Marxist theory by exercising it in this task. Its departments are four. To begin with the simplest.

1. Historical Materialism. We haven't to do research as Lenin had to do. In this highly-organized country masses of material exist on all topics. The first American Revolution, the Second and the Third, these are our themes. Hitherto we have lived mentally in 1789, 1848, 1871, 1917, the Social Democracy, the Third International. We shall never be able to depart from those. They are international. But we must use them as a means to an end. Our revolution is after all the American Revolution. The specific economic development of the United States, the special social relations which they produced, the political parties and the special qualities which distinguish the American from the European development. It is obvious that the leading American comrades must have accumulated knowledge and ideas about these questions. We cannot keep them in our heads any longer. Late in his career Engels planned enthusiastically to rewrite his Peasant War in Germany in order to make it a preparation for the understanding of modern Germany. Engels was no academic historian or lover of theory, for theory's sake. He considered it his business to educate the workers from the highest possible standards.

A tremendous field is here waiting to be opened, a field which will not only bring practical results but is of the highest theoretical importance. The present writer has found that precisely because of the absence of feudal remnants in modern America, many of the most abstract analyses of Marx find their most perfect exemplification in the United States. Today this is the model capitalist country. Here increasingly in the future the utmost implications of the theory will be practically demonstrated. This is of national and international importance. The poverty of what passes for Marxist or radical thought in America is amazing. The Hackers, the Abram Harrises, the Beards and the rest are all petty-bourgeois radicals spreading their poison unchecked. We have to carry on a merciless war of Marxist interpretation against their pseudo-Marxist fabrications and fantasies. The American working-class, as is inevitable, is waking up to its history as a class, an inevitable stage in its socialistic development. We have to treat this history as militant Marxists. A book like the

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Beard's Basic History at 69% is going to do a vast amount of mischief to workers anxious to learn. We give it credit for what is good but denounce it as Marxists. We give our own interpretation. We publish our own analysis. We publish our own studies. And peculiarly enough, that is how we make international classics. Daniel DeLeon wrote two pamphlets; WHAT MEANS THIS STRIKE and TWO PAGES OF ROMAN HISTORY, which, we are reliably informed, were among the treasured pamphlets of many workers in Britain. If in the course of a year we can publish in the journal Marxist studies of the Civil War and a real Marxist analysis of the rise and social and historical significance of the CIO, we shall have accomplished a truly great beginning. From these articles will come pamphlets, and will come a deepening of the political education in LA. From these articles will come the historical backing necessary for the propaganda for the Labor Party. We are all aware of something missing in our propaganda for the Labor Party. It has not the fundamental theoretical basis concretely expounded. Lenin insists that from the very beginning of the Socialist movement in Russia two trends appeared, opportunism and Marxism. His greatest work after 1914 was the theoretical analysis of the economic causes of this. Day after day he analyzed it economically, politically, socially. For him this education the workers needed above all. What have we done to make this a living part of the knowledge and experience of the U.S. workers and radicals? Absolutely nothing. Sure we say that the labor leaders are reactionary, pro-Roosevelt, pro-war. We say they are scoundrels. Those are just agitational statements. The general impression that our agitation gives is of reactionary labor leaders who deceive the workers. This is theoretically false. The labor leaders do not function in a vacuum. Not an issue of the NI should come out in which from one angle or another we did not treat from the roots up the basis of opportunism in the U.S. And in this way we perform an international service. It will not be long before its influence will appear in LA, propagandist and agitational pamphlets and the daily work of the members.

2. Marxian economics. The sad record of the magazine here speaks for itself. It is sufficient to say that the economic question of questions in our day is the question of capitalist accumulation. The debate in Lenin's day raged around the question of the realization of surplus value. The same question arose in Germany just before the last war. Rosa Luxemburg's study of accumulation also took the form of a study of realization. These were not "theoretical essays", as only a lamentable ignorance can believe. They were aspects of the class struggle expressing themselves theoretically both within and without the labor movement. The debate, as was historically inevitable, has now gone a stage further. It has moved from Vol. II of Capital to Vol. III. This is above all an American question. Stuart Chase, Hansen, all the government economists, all the "experts" who gave evidence before the TNEC, the whole economic basis of the New Deal, all these pose this fundamental question in terms of raising the standard of living of the workers as a means for the continued development of capitalism. The Stalinists have now taken this up and are preparing a highly theoretical assault upon our previous conception of Marx's CAPITAL. These conceptions represent the instinctive political economy of every labor leader in the country and the belief of great masses of workers. All the labor leaders are not vulgar fakers. The workers are not fools. The basis of this belief is the obvious power of the American economy.

Particularly today it seems to them obvious that by government regulation and raising of wages the American economy can function in a manner satisfactory to everybody; it is merely the wickedness and selfishness of the bad capitalists which prevents this. Yet so limited is our conception of our tasks that except for agitational shouting about the profits of capitalism and the unemployed to come, we leave these ideas to go their own unchecked way. Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and Bukharin carried their opposition to these things to the point of pedantry. They were great activists all. But the classics of Marxism which we read today did a wonderful work in their day, still live and will always live, because they tackled the false ideas of their time from the root and taught the workers by precept and example to seek bourgeois conceptions out at their source and destroy them there.

The method here is important. Lenin never deviated one inch from his stand as a Marxist. He said "This and this is Marx's view. I now propose to apply it, to Russian capitalism or agriculture or whatever it was." His work on the state was a commentary on what Marx and Engels said about it. He stood before the workers as a Marxist who based whatever he was doing on strict Marxist theory, but Marxist theory applied to Russia. This is the way a Marxist party is built; militantly, arrogantly Marxist theoreticians, militantly and arrogantly taking it to the worker of the nation.

### 3. Bolshevism. This can be brief. It is the American counterpart of WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The building of the party is not advanced one inch by repeating that the party must be built. Between 1928-38 we have been excessively concerned about the struggles of the Left Opposition and the historical antecedents of our Trotskyite movement. This will always remain of importance to us but we have different aims now. The present writer proposes to organize some of the material in this document for publication in the NI. Particularly the section dealing with the international attempts at party building will be amplified. But there are also sources of experience in American history which concern not scholars but have valuable lessons for the tasks which we are trying to do today, not only for us, but for the American workers. It is here if only in reverse, that they can learn what a genuine Bolshevik Party is. There is a wealth of experience in this country from the early German attempts to introduce Marxism to the U.S., the old Socialist Party, the various attempts at Workers Education, the beginning of the Communist Party here, successes and failures of Marxism in America. A clear sequence can be traced, of infinite value in our education and in the education of our readers. Here then is also necessary a close study of the conditions in Russia and the methods which the Bolsheviks used to build the first and only Bolshevik Party. The material exists in English and for the most part by Lenin done both at the time and in retrospect. Written for American readers and for American workers it will have not only general educational value but concrete application to the problem of party-building in the United States. Once we embrace our readers in this problem we have gone far towards making them Bolshevik in approach, that is to say, concerned about building the revolutionary party. Once we familiarize ourselves with these problems in the journal, then it will become easy for all of us to handle them naturally in Labor Action as it was easy in the old days to propagandize.



dize and agitate on the S.P. in Germany and the crimes of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

4. Dialectical Materialism. Dialectical Materialism is not something to be defended against Hook, Eastman and Burnham. It is the philosophy and the theory of knowledge of Marxism. To use a phrase Marx used in his early writings it is the theoretical basis of scientific humanism. Today when all thinkers are groping like drunken men, with all their points of support and reference gone, we have here a weapon whose power and value was never so great as in the prevailing confusion. In one article, in particular, "St. Paul, Laski and Stalin" the present writer has tried to demonstrate how the method can be used in defence of the more general views of life and society that we stand for. But that is merely a beginning. In every field the method of logical development and historical manifestation brings results in clarification and illumination which will be felt in every sphere of our work. Lenin was always a dialectician but it was only in 1914 that he studied seriously its origin in the Hegelian dialectic. And after that he became one of the strongest advocates of its study in Russia, demanded that extracts from Hegel and interpretations be printed in the theoretical journal. He knew and said that mistakes would be made but added that whoever was afraid of mistakes would not do anything. It cannot be said with sufficient emphasis that "defence" of the dialectic against Hook and Eastman is today the least of our problems. It is not a precious jewel in a box to be defended against them. It is a weapon to be used. In the study and practice of Historical Materialism, Marxian Economics and Bolshevism, it will be a guiding thread making points clear and helping us to make them clear to others. Contradictions, opposites, negation, negation of negation, quantity into quality, transcendence, condition, possibility, these are not jokes or a kind of intellectual family heirloom that you "defend" fiercely against attack without ever knowing what they mean.\* Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky did not concern themselves with nonsense or some outworn intellectual ritual. There is today a great desire among Marxists to know more about this subject and the literature on this subject is growing. We play no part in it at all. Not only is this interest inevitable and legitimate in general. The age we live in is one which calls for ideas and tests them ruthlessly. Dialectic will make its way with us or without. It would be to our advantage to study what is traditionally ours.

"Scholasticism" - There is not only a way to do these things. There is a way not to do them. In the last two issues of the NI there has been a change in the type of articles. Douglas Ellis has written on allied imperialism, Emmett has written on "The Great Contradictions", between Vol.I and Vol.III, and James Barrett a long article dealing with the "Anti-Marxian Offensive". With these may be classed three articles of a series on Burnham by Fahan. These articles typify the reverse side of what is wrong with the N.I. An empirical approach does not necessarily ignore theory. No Marxist admits that he ignores theory. What happens is that theory is given a special status. It becomes something divorced from the practical pursuits. A theoretician becomes a scholar, a "learned" man and theory becomes the business of a few who have time. In other words, it becomes precisely what Lenin never let it become, a kind of cultural decoration. Articles are written which, if not written, would never be missed or asked for. For example, an article on the Great Contradiction, proving by a long list

of quotations that Marx did not contradict himself, serves what purpose? The long articles on the "Anti-Marxian Offensive" dealing with Hook, Shumpeter, and others is full of knowledge and hard work but it is a typically scholastic piece. It characterizes these writers as "unfair", "illogical", subject to "technical compulsives", "falsifying Marx's theory of the State," etc. etc. In the same vein Fahan spends some invaluable twelve pages on Burnham proving that Burnham has refuted the theory of human nature, of sociology, that he has borrowed from Pareto, etc. etc. This type of writing helps nobody except those people who are interested academically in study and professorial discussions. They reek of lectures and class rooms and college journals.

First of all, the ideas of all these bourgeois writers should under no circumstances fill all that space in our journal if treated in that way. Periodically one or two or a bunch of them should be handled, preferably those who are creating an interest in labor circles. When they are dealt with, the main purpose should be twofold: (1) to show exactly what stage of bourgeois thought they represent and how these ideas are affected by the stage of development of society and particularly of the working class. That they are illogical, traitorous Marxism, etc. is nothing new. They always have and always will. The point is in what way they do it, why, what is the relation of this type of anti-Marxism to previous ones, and what it means to the labor movement today. (2) to seize the opportunity for a positive exposition of some aspect of Marxism thought and show them up positively. Thus the renegades and anti-Marxists of the present day are all rooted in the fact that there is no powerful political labor movement in the United States. This gives their work a special American slant. And there are many similar angles. But the whole treatment should be modelled on Marx's essay on Proudhon, or Engels on Dühring, or Lenin on the Narodnik falsifiers of historical materialism, or Rosa Luxemburg on Bernstein. There is a way of doing these things. Joe Leonard's article on Williams, for example, is with respect to method vastly superior to these professorial discourses. Not only do they not do what they ought to do. In one respect they do harm for they foster exactly that attitude to theory as something on the shelf, a struggle of books against books, which the great Marxists in their practice and method constantly repudiated. This assortment of pieces will not only not raise the Marxist level of the magazine. It will not only give an illusory idea that "at least we are having some theory". It will attract only the wrong type of student who will see Hook on one side and the NI on the other, arguing about the same thing on different sides but in much the same sort of way. Finally it reinforces the active party member in the sentiment that he would like to study some "theory" but he hasn't the time to spare for it. When Lenin argued on theory no one ever mistook him for a mere debater with his opponent. And both he and Marx in particular could write on the most abstruse subjects and yet make the worker who ventured into its pages feel that this was something of the utmost interest and concern to the working class. This power was not psychological. It sprang from their whole method of analysis. And that is not learnt in a day. The task of the NI should be to teach these undoubtedly talented comrades and friends to use their talents in the Marxist manner.

#### CONCLUSION

At the meeting on the American question which preceded the 1944 convention, I listed three propagandist points as ones on which we

should center our attention.

1. The Americanization of Bolshevism
2. The Statification of Production
3. Internationalism

Points No. 2 and 3 will have to wait. I have tried here to abstract propaganda and agitation and education from work among the masses. But such an abstraction has all the one-sidedness of an abstraction. In actual life the mass work will guide and shape the theoretical approach at every stage. Contact with the proletariat usually results in that. But the theoretical work will guide the mass work also. The orientation outlined here will demand serious attention from all of us precisely because we are cadres for a party. The perpetual refrain of "lack of forces" is no answer. A leading comrade can go to Chicago for 14 days or go on tours lasting weeks to settle some union problem or to make speeches. The party does not collapse in their absence. But we are told that through "lack of forces" no one can find 14 days to write a pamphlet on "What is the Workers Party?" Isn't the argument ridiculous? The pamphlets are not written because the real need for them is not understood. More profoundly we have not got that body of material in the NI in pamphlets and small books which both in material and manner were such as we had in 1928-38 and enabled us to write the kind of pamphlets or articles we needed at the drop of a hat.

Let me here conclude with the question of education, propaganda, agitation in its relation to the fundamental question of the building of the party.

The American mass party will not be built by us or by the Cannonites. Groups of Virginia miners, West Coast sailors, Southern sharecroppers, Pittsburgh steel workers, all sorts of "left" formations will coalesce in time and hammer out a unified organization. They will bring their qualities. Our task is to form such a strong nucleus that the coalescence will take place around us, or even that does not take place, our special contribution will be Marxism and the theory and practice of Bolshevism. But to do this we have to gather a nucleus of a few thousands, of whom 75% will be American workers, men and women, instinctively hostile to bourgeois society, who are workers, have been workers and who have no other prospect in life except to be workers. They and only they can build a mass party. They are the only real mass propagandists and agitators, day after day. They exist in tens of thousands already and capitalism will create more and more thousands for us. But they need to be given, not prospects of a happy life and higher wages, but a method of thought and a conception of social development that makes their own lives and efforts intelligible to them in national and international terms. They need to know that in Marxism and the revolutionary party they have something which, even if far from being completely understood, yet is theirs. Proletarian thought, proletarian method must be for them a challenge to the bourgeoisie at all points, defeating it in theory as the workers will one day defeat it in practice. For them it must be a theory which marks off those who adhere to it from all others giving them pride and confidence and the consciousness of a great superiority to all however

influential or famous who do not accept Marxism. That is Bolshevism. That is what Lenin in his day and with his problems from the start strove to create.

It is with such people that we can in time grow rapidly. From now and henceforth there will be increasingly rapid breaks in the national consciousness and in the social development of the working class. This class will increasingly throw off substantial numbers of workers breaking with the traditional and petty-bourgeois ideologies. If within their own environment and of their own proletarian origin, there are trained and conscious Marxists, each of these can form at critical stages the rallying center of dozens and perhaps scores of adherents. The workers in the U.S. have no allegiance to any traditional workers parties as had the workers of Europe. Broadly speaking, the whole field is open, and by laying the necessary foundation with thoroughness and confidence we can legitimately expect the American workers as they respond to declining capitalism will find it impossible to pass us by.

#### PART IV: CONCRETE PROPOSALS

Obviously from the whole argument above, this will be no list of articles or proposals for columns which will solve the difficulties of the party. I therefore merely indicate the following as immediate concrete steps for the next period in the direction outlined. Here I must revert to what is proper logical order.

#### The New International

A. Through straight articles or book reviews, we need as preparation for indispensable pamphlets:

1. A series of studies of the American Labor movement, A.F. of L. and I.W.O. and then A.F. of L. and C.I.O., along the lines dealt with in the section on the NI above.
2. The Civil War as the American bourgeois revolution. (Trotsky wanted to write a History of the Civil War.) This is the theoretical basis for the coming social revolution.
3. The American Revolution of 1776. From here flow all the ideology and current social thought of the country: Constitution, Bill of Rights, Founding Fathers. We have to start breaking that up, as Marxists.

From this should come in time two full length pamphlets:

1. "The Communist Manifesto" of America, an analysis of American development from 1776 to today.
2. An analysis of the labor movement and its role in American history with special emphasis on the A.F. of L. and the C.I.O.

These should be our permanent standby. They should last forever--at least until socialism, and all our class should begin with them and immediately after, or side by side, the Communist Manifesto, etc. They must bear our stamp, our label.



B. The whole theoretical discussion of accumulation, with a practical application to the economics of the government spending must begin. If we do so two or three articles in a year, we have done well. But we must begin.

C. The Socialist Party, the beginning of the C.P. in this country, the Third Party; studies of these, not academic but in the Leninist manner, for our own education and the education of the workers, must begin to appear in the journal. With articles on Bolshavism and its beginnings, as a historical standard of comparison, we shall begin to create the theoretical premises for an American Bolshavism and in time do our own "What is to be Done?"

D. The writings of Marx, Engels, Plekhanov and the other classics on Dialectical Materialism must find a place in the paper. Not every month or every three months but steadily, so that we consciously begin to illuminate our own work with the Marxist scientific method.

We, being what we are, the above divisions are in descending order of importance. American development comes first in time and energy and space. But we have to work systematically at the others too.

#### Archives:

Here we have two things to do.

A. The writings, letters, etc., of Marx Engels, Lenin, Sorge, Trotsky on America have a value far beyond their scattered character. They must be collected, annotated and published. "Lenin on Britain" is a famous and very precious volume in Britain. Lenin's two letters to the American workers, for example, should be at once reprinted in the paper.

B. We have to start reprinting and annotating some carefully chosen classics of American revolutionaries. For example, David Walker's Appeal, Speeches of Wendell Phillips, etc.

#### The Negro Question

Here, as Marxist interpreters, the field is ours, Negroes and populism, Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglas, the Garvey movement, whatever serious work we do here will not only educate ourselves but will be gobbled up by the Negro people, masses and intellectuals alike, and progressive white workers.

#### Party Pamphlets

We need two at once:

1. What is the Workers Party?
2. The Labor Party

They should be serious pamphlets both cast in a historical mould. Both pamphlets should be carefully coordinated, so that the reader who reads them both should have a clear but briefly stated idea of the development of the labor movement and of the function of the two parties. Closely linked with this must be the publication of a formal Declaration of Principles and general program. This is a crying necessity.

# Labor Action and the Pamphlets

A substantial section of the paper must reflect in popular form the work done on this propagandist effort. Some of the pamphlets or extracts from them must actually appear week after week in the paper. Articles in the NI can be summarized with suitable extracts. The party program and explanatory articles must constantly appear in the paper. There must be a constant tie-up, literary, political and promotional between the NI, the solid propagandist pamphlets and the paper.

Reviews of books should play an important part in the paper. They must not be watered down. Two reviews which have appeared or will appear in the NI have every place in the paper, one by Shachtman on Wilkie's One World and another on Wechsler's study of John L. Lewis. Life, Time, The Saturday Evening Post, Collier, Look, constantly have articles of the most serious quality by highly qualified writers who do not write down. These are read by millions. A recent article in Life on Capitalism and the Free Market is a case in point. These and not articles in the New York Times should be the target of systematic, comprehensive and fully Marxist replies by LA. Life writes on the free market? Good. We write the Marxist view of the free market. The Saturday Evening Post writes about cartels and monopolies? Next week we write one or two articles on monopolies and cartels unpassing at all - superficiality and preaching our own views. We say that the classic work on monopolies is Lenin's Imperialism. We refer to our book service. We refer to a current article in the NI. We denounce cartels, but we teach, we explain, we deliberately lift the worker above his daily struggles.

Education. The above document is not a programmatic document. Once the theoretical necessity is grasped, then the organizational arrangements, the courses of study, etc. are, to start with, a matter of collaborative effort. This, however must be said. This document repudiates entirely that conception of education which sends out documents about the speeches of Roosevelt and lists of war profits and war scandals.

J.R. Johnson