

Campaigning for Communism

By Wm. Z. Foster

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Among the many impressions gathered by myself during the campaign is a realization that our party militants have much need to become

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better acquainted with the technique of organizing mass meetings. This fact was borne home to me emphatically by my participation in scores of gatherings encompassing many thousands of people. Mass meetings are an important method of carrying the message of Communism to the rank and file of the working class, and much of their success depends upon the skill with which they are organized and conducted. My campaign experience goes to show that many of our comrades in charge have a great deal to learn in order to properly utilize the valuable organizing and propaganda medium of the mass meeting.

One of the particular difficulties they encounter seems to be with regard to halls. There is a strong tendency to hire halls altogether too large. Many of the comrades in charge fail to properly estimate the crowd that can be expected to attend. This is a serious defect. It works out bad several ways. For one thing, it loads down the meeting with a needless expense and usually creates a disastrous deficit. I saw many illustrations of this, where halls were rented for \$150 and \$200 when others would have served the purpose as well for a fraction of that amount. In one town where our organization is quite weak, some of the comrades even proposed to hire the local ball park, whereas when the crowd was actually gotten together in a hall it counted not over 200 people.

Selection of Halls.

But worse than the needless expense involved in a too large hall is the bad psychological effect produced upon the crowd. Empty chairs simply ruin a meeting. Far better a small hall jammed with people than the same number of people seated in a too large hall. The more a crowd is bunched together the better it responds to the speaker. During the campaign I spoke, for example, to a crowd of 1,500 people in a hall that seated 3,500. The result was a comparative failure. The sight of so many empty seats carried to the crowd unconsciously the conviction that the meeting was a frost. The same crowd in a hall half as large would have been much more enthusiastic and responsive. The too large hall disease is one that should be corrected in the organization of our Party meetings, likewise the hiring of fancy downtown halls instead of the popular halls patronized by the masses.

There is also a lack of appreciation of the important fact that crowds, in order to be receptive and responsive, must be comfortable. Hence the halls must be properly lighted, heated, and ventilated. Dark, cold, or stuffy halls simply destroy the effect at meetings. Too often those in charge pay no attention to such matters. They take the halls just as the janitors turn them over, instead of carefully

seeing to every detail beforehand. Dark halls should be avoided. The more lights there are the better. Crowds are not receptive. The same Many times I have seen the turning on of lights give a new spirit to a crowd. Cold is also fatal to a meeting. Comrades arranging meetings in cold weather should never depend upon chance to take care of the heating of the halls. Many an otherwise good meeting has been spoiled by the hall being too cold. Shivering crowds are not receptive. The same is true of crowds in unventilated halls. It is enough to make a speaker lose his mind to see the way the ventilation problem is handled sometimes. First, the hall will be entirely unventilated. Then someone will open every window in the place, only to be followed shortly afterward by someone else who closes every one, raising havoc in the meeting meantime. A little intelligent foresight would avoid all this harrowing inconvenience. Even the arrangement of the chairs is of real importance in making a meeting a success. Again the tendency is to accept things as the janitors leave them. This often means a chaotic arrangement. A special duty of the committee in

tions. Ushers, properly organized, would save this serious annoyance. But ushers who don't know their job are worse than none at all. They can break up a meeting quicker, by running aimlessly around, than even the late-coming visitors. A first requisite for a successful meeting is an active floor committee that takes full charge of maintaining order. Especially this committee should see to it that the committeemen themselves are in their seats. Often these seem to think they have a special license to run helter-skelter about the meeting and that this does not create disturbance. Silence in the audience is essential for good meetings.

Like many other organizations, our party is afflicted with the chairman evil. The different ways an inexperienced chairman can spoil a meeting are as numerous as they are disastrous. The best chairman is he who devotes himself to the technical business of handling the meeting from the platform. The less he says to the meeting the better. Nothing is more exasperating to a speaker or more wearisome to a crowd than to have the chairman launch out continually into long speeches upon every occasion. Especially criminal is that

campaign of advertising amongst all kinds of working class organizations, including trade unions, fraternal associations, co-operatives, etc. Above all, meetings should be held at the factory gates to acquaint the working masses of the approaching mass meetings. This is done all too seldom. Our comrades are too much inclined to confine their efforts simply to announcing their meetings thru a few radical channels and to a circulation indiscriminately of handbills. In this day of movies, radio, and a thousand other attractions to lure the sleepy-minded workers away from all serious consideration of their problem, the building of mass meetings is a real task.

Skill and Hard Labor Needed.

Whatever is worth while for our Party to do at all, should be done well. Inasmuch as we must use mass meetings as a means of carrying our program to the great rank and file of labor, we should learn to do the job with the utmost efficiency. The comrades throughout the Party should give much more attention to this fact that has hitherto been the case. We should not be content to go along with the slipshod methods that prevail in other organizations of workers. When we call a meeting we should build it into a success, into something that will be a credit to our Party. "I say "build" advisedly, because, under existing conditions in the United States, successful working class meetings are actually built by skill and hard labor.

In the foregoing I have sketched a few of the essentials that should be constantly borne in mind in the organization of mass meetings. There should be a live committee in charge of the work wherever such a meeting is contemplated. This committee should take nothing for granted but should use its intelligence in every detail of the work. It should see to it that the hall secured is of a popular character, well situated, and not too large. The committee should assume full responsibility for the heating, lighting, and ventilation of the hall, leaving nothing to the imagination of the janitor. Then a widespread campaign should be initiated directly amongst the masses of the workers to attract them to the meeting. A vigorous floor committee should be on the job to see that order is preserved in the meeting, and an experienced chairman secured to control the meeting.

Scientific Method Necessary.

These recommendations may seem obvious, but, unfortunately, all too often they are not. Strangely enough, in spite of so much experience in this direction, the workers are exceedingly unskilled in the organization of meetings. The crimes that the trade unions commit in this respect are almost unbelievable. For example, a few years ago the Chicago Federation of Labor, following out its usual incompetent and primitive methods, called a mass meeting to protest against the threatening execution of Tom Mooney. Although there were 200,000 workers in the city, only 200 of them showed up at the meeting. Disgusted at this fiasco, the radical delegates of the Federation, headed by J. W. Johnstone, moved the reholding of the meeting. They set out systematically to build up the meeting, with the result that a few weeks later 20,000 workers poured into the great Coliseum to demonstrate for Mooney. It was one of the greatest working class meetings in the history of Chicago and it was the result of scientific organization methods.

We must apply scientific methods in the building and controlling of Workers Party meetings to a greater extent than is now the case. Mass meetings form an important part of our propaganda and should be properly organized. A careful study of the foregoing hints will help a great deal in this direction. Whenever the Workers Party calls a mass meeting it must be a real outpouring of the workers. Wherever a mass meeting is a failure it is an indication that the comrades in charge do not understand their job.

FRENCH WORKERS DEMAND SOVIET RECOGNITION



Herriot "Consents" to Recognize.

in charge should be to see that the crowd is properly bunched together and seated close up to the speaker.

Duty of Committeemen.

The maintenance of order in meetings is such a prime necessity that one would believe it hardly necessary to mention here. But many comrades lack an appreciation of the fact. They let the crowd practically take care of itself as best it can. Usually no arrangements are made to seat the incoming people, with the result that, after the meeting is in session, they meander in searching for seats, to the infinite disturbance of everyone. It is enough to give a speaker nervous prostration to watch such interrup-

type of chairman who, drawing upon his own imagination, undertakes to tell the crowd just what the speaker is going to speak about. I had many experiences with such loquacious chairmen during the campaign. They are the bane of the speaker's life. Once proven guilty, by such an exhibition of garrulousness on the platform, they should be sent into political exile. The same fate should be meted out to those sinners who go upon the platform without a gavel, without thoroughly acquainting themselves with the literature that is to be sold, and the order in which the speakers talk, or without making any other of the many necessary preparations for properly handling a meeting. Such incompetence is altogether inexcusable and should not be tolerated. An experienced chairman is the life of a successful mass meeting. We should have more of them.

Build the Mass Meetings.

In the campaign it became quite evident to me that our comrades were not going to the masses effectively in order to build up our mass meetings. There was too much of a tendency to restrict our efforts just to our own circle of members and immediate sympathizers. This was a big mistake. If our meetings were not up to expectation in certain places it was almost entirely due to this fault. No sooner would I take a look at a crowd than I could tell whether or not it had been built up by real work among the masses. The building of a Communist mass meeting requires genuine effort. The announcement of a meeting should immediately be followed by a widespread and systematic

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lated continent. It is connected with its colonies, it lives on the sweat of these colonies. To think that the conference can change anything for the better in the relations between Europe and the colonies, that it may stop or retard the development of the conflicts between these, means to believe in miracles.

What then is the conclusion?

There is only one conclusion. The London conference did not settle a single one of the outstanding conflicts in Europe, but has supplemented them by new conflicts, by conflicts between America and England. No doubt England will, as before, deepen the antagonism between England and

Germany, in order to secure political domination on the continent. No doubt America in its turn will deepen the antagonism between England and France in order to secure its hegemony on the world market. We do not speak of the deep-lying antagonism between Germany and the Entente. The world events will be determined by these antagonisms, and not by the "pacifist" speeches of the hangman Hughes or of the eloquent Herriot. The law of the unequal development of capitalist countries and of the inevitability of imperialist wars, remains in force now more than ever. The London conference only camouflages these antagonisms, in order to create the conditions for their greatest intensification.