

Two Conferences Discuss Our Contents and Future

By MAX GORDON

Thirteen-year-old Steffie of Detroit was not a bit fazed by the fact she was speaking to a sober gathering of adults.

"I read the paper quite often and find it interesting," she said, referring, of course, to *The Worker*. "But a lot of it I find hard to understand. So do some of my friends who also like to read it. I like the front page and the editorials, but a lot of the stuff inside is hard to follow."

With these words, she helped to touch off a vigorous, highly constructive debate on the content, form and future of *The Worker* and *Daily Worker* among delegates from five states who gathered in Chicago a few weeks ago for a Midwest regional conference.

It was the first of two such gatherings. A three-state parley in the East the following weekend also helped to throw light on some of the problems faced by the two papers.

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A MAJOR PART of both conferences was devoted to the con-

tent and future of the two papers. The participants likewise conferred on problems and experience in circulation, laid plans for 1957 circulation campaign, talked over the means and necessity of raising the funds to keep the paper going.

The job the two papers have to perform currently was placed perhaps most sharply at the Midwest gathering in the remarks of Claude Lightfoot, Communist leader. Lightfoot posed the problem: How do Marxists maintain their identity in, and present their position to, the advancing popular democratic movement in the country?

The Left today, he noted, does not have the positions of leadership it once had in the struggles of the workers, Negro people, small farmers. These groups are now on the march. The Left does not have the initiative, but has not yet thought through its relations with them.

He expressed the view that the Left must present its position independently chiefly through the Marxist press. This, he implied, is a clue both to the content of this press and to the necessity for wider circulation.

THERE WERE additional viewpoints offered as to the role of the Marxist press. Thus, some believed that with the sharp political divisions within the Left today, the paper had a special unifying part to play. This was seen in two ways.

First, the paper was crusading on major issues facing the people, regarding which there were no differences within the Left. As Fred Blair of Wisconsin put it, there are

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far more things that unite the Left than divide it, it is necessary to get together on those. Singled out were The Worker's crusades on banning H-bomb tests and on changing Senate Rule 22, the rule which permits Southern Dixiecrats to filibuster against anti-discrimination bills.

Second, there was the struggle to save the paper. Though sharp differences were expressed with the Daily Worker's position regarding Hungary-Soviet relations, there was also the unanimous view that all had to get together to put over the paper's circulation and fund campaigns. This itself, it was felt, could aid in unifying the movement.

Inevitably, the Daily Worker's approach to the Hungary events came under fire. Some believed the paper made a mistake in taking a definitive view of the Nov. 4 intervention by Soviet troops when the lack of specific fact called for only the most tentative opinions. Others thought the paper should have supported the intervention, while still others backed the paper's position.

But as editor John Gates said at the eastern conference, there are sharp differences in the world Marxist movement and within Marxist movements in many countries. No one can claim to have all the answers. It is necessary to argue out differences fraternally, without bitterness, while working unitedly and actively for the program of the Marxist movement.

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THERE WAS some discussion on the advisability of giving up the Daily Worker in order to put out an improved Worker. Most felt, however, that it would be a severe blow to the Marxist movement to give up the D.W. today in addition to which its revival later would be a very tough job. It was noted that the Worker staff had been expanded, many improvements have been projected, and, as some speakers maintained, it has already been considerably improved.

There was some debate on the character of The Worker: whether it should address itself primarily to the Left or to all class-conscious workers, whether it should present controversy and debate, whether it should solicit articles from progressive and socialist figures outside of the Left.

The overwhelming view, as far as this writer could judge, was that

it must be a paper written for all workers, that it should present varying viewpoints in its news columns, should be challenging in its ideas and get people with differing opinions to write for it.

It was also widely felt that the language needs to be simplified and articles should be shorter. Little Steffie was by no means alone in this view.

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PROPOSALS for improvement were many and highly practical. Outstanding was the opinion that there needs to be systematic discussion of socialism, especially as it applies to the American scene; that the paper needs to crusade around a specific program; that it needs to present live reporting, deal with popular attitudes present background material which furnishes information not available elsewhere as well as livelier and more useful features, material on problems of youth, etc.

Reports on circulation indicated that The Worker is being sold systematically in front of Detroit shops and union gatherings; that readers who were lost five and six years ago have been regained readily in Wisconsin and Minnesota; that wherever The Worker has been sold from door-to-door in working-class areas of Chicago, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, routes have been or could be established and permanent readers won.

The big problem, it appeared, was to get people to sell it.

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subscriptions and 2300 for the I between now and April 30. Th more than was actually obtained same period last year.

• While we make no specific regarding circulation of Worker bun every organized group and state the Press Committee to set its based on its circumstances.

• As regards organization, we every state and county group, an select its drive directors at once a area group to guarantee success paign. We suggest this be done l Meanwhile all subs received fro l will be considered part of the c

Where do we go for the subs?
FIRST, there are large numbe subscriptions expiring before Ap need to be renewed, and can be w follow-up.

SECOND, there are large numb whose subs ran out this year who