

PROLETARIAN PRESS POLICY

The Bolshevik party was begun and built through the newspaper Iskra. This is no accident, no "Russian peculiarity" based on the conditions of illegality. A newspaper is a necessary means to unify the economic, political and theoretical struggles of the revolutionary working class movement. A newspaper is a necessary condition for the integration of local, national and international work. It will be first of all through a newspaper that the revolutionary movement can go beyond "economism", and raise the class consciousness of the working masses, the awareness of the contradiction between capitalism and the basic interests of every oppressed group. A newspaper is the first means by which the communist party can reach the advanced elements of all classes, and become a vanguard. Iskra referred to itself as a collective propagandist, a collective agitator and a collective organizer. Lenin compared it to the scaffolding, indispensable for the construction of a solid building - the party. In fact, in its initial stages, when the "party" is no more than a propaganda group, struggling to elaborate a correct program and develop ties with the masses, the newspaper will be the most comprehensive, the most concrete expression of the party as a whole.

Until now, the Spartacist League has suffered greatly from the lack of a regular press. The existence of both the Spartacist, as a theoretical and political journal, and Workers' Action, as a journal for the trade unions, was an inadequate and cumbersome format. On the one hand, distribution to working class arenas was limited to Workers' Action. Broad questions of theory and political practice were neglected. However, the role of theory in a communist press is key. A correct revolutionary theory means the difference between victory and defeat for the working class. It is a vital necessity for every revolutionary worker and cannot remain the private property of a few "party intellectuals". If the masses make history, then the masses above all need revolutionary theory. Workers' Action has been the de facto mass press of the SL and it has seriously neglected theory.

We therefore greet the establishment of Workers Vanguard, "a Marxist working class monthly, published by the Spartacist League," with enthusiasm. But it is only a first step, and immediately raises the question of a correct proletarian press policy. Engels spoke of three sides to the struggle of the workers movement - "the theoretical, the political and the practical-economic". Our mass press must strike a balance between the three aspects of the class struggle. Workers' Action never even presented adequate coverage of the economic side of this struggle, suffering from a severe lack of economic analysis - articles on monetary stability, foreign trade and its effect on jobs, the nature of a capitalist crisis, etc. A correct economic and political understanding of the crisis is indispensable to turn the spontaneously developing militance against the capitalist system itself. Workers' Vanguard should give publicity to the struggles in which SL fractions are involved, but emphasis and analysis should also be devoted to all important struggles of the class, always raising appropriate points of a transitional program in order to expose the limits of militant trade unionism. Even exposures of factory abuses are of great importance, if they focus on the typical and most pernicious examples.

A mass paper should also seek to raise issues of capitalist exploitation and oppression of all types, not simply point-of-production wages-and-working-conditions issues. As Lenin pointed out, it is only in the broader class struggle that socialist consciousness can be raised. And it is only by raising such issues that the revolutionary communist party can lead the struggles of all oppressed groups. Extensive coverage and analysis should be devoted to women's liberation, the liberation of oppressed racial minorities, international struggles, and all phases of national politics from farm subsidies to schools. The student and anti-war movements should also receive extensive attention. Broader, less directly political issues, such as art, child rearing or sports must not be neglected, but should always be analyzed from a strictly Marxist point of view. The capitalist press will handle the straight reporting here.

of proletarian
Workers' Vanguard must center on the working class, it must have a pronounced proletarian character. It must not presume an exceptionally high level of education of the readership, nor, what is worse, talk down to advanced workers (Challenge). It must be an openly communist press, but should place heavy emphasis on analyzing partial struggles or political exposures which will enable the working masses to learn from direct experience of the need to overthrow capitalism. Its style should be bold and direct, avoiding sloganeering and attempting to present all issues in an educational, rather than simply declamatory fashion. It is important that the press receive exposure in working class areas. Therefore, distribution should be undertaken at fac-

ories, subways, etc., as well as at gatherings of the left.

We feel substantial time and resources should be committed to Workers' Vanguard. [We recognize that there are important financial and personnel limitations and do not wish to sacrifice our party and arena work to the paper, as the Workers League does. This is what makes it crucial to plan very carefully our press, making sure of a proper balance in the material we include as well as the right thrust in its delivery.]

As a means of making these suggestions for proletarian press policy more concrete we are appending a brief critique of the Sept. 1971 issue of Workers' Action, described in the 22 Aug. PB memorandum as "representative in all but the new name of the kind of paper we aim to produce".

The Sept. issue of Workers' Action is, for us, seriously inadequate as a mass paper of a revolutionary party. To begin with there was no article on theory. Even if the Spartacist were to become a theoretical journal, theoretical articles of topical importance should appear in Workers' Vanguard. An appropriate topic for this issue might have been treating the current crisis in the framework of the Marxist theory of capitalist development. Presented in the mass press, such an article must place a premium on forceful presentation, concise and direct language, a restriction to the necessary minimum of specifically Marxist terminology, and concrete examples of the political implications of incorrect theory.

The issue introduces more topical political material than Workers' Action of the past. But it focuses to exclusively on the NPAC conference. This was an important conference, meriting a long article (half-page, perhaps). A lot of the material actually printed was repetitive or non-essential. A number of political events of great potential educational value were ignored to make room for this. A separate article analyzing China's Nixon move; an article reporting the Atlanta Mayday conference, and emphasizing the results of uncritical support to gay liberation; an article about Betty Friedan's new female political organization and the dangers of bourgeois feminism, an article about the Bolivian events and the role of the POR. At least these should have been given concise reporting and analysis.

The economic struggles of the class were also underemphasized. The CWA article was much too lengthy with considerable secondary material (more appropriate to CWA caucus newsletters than to a press directed at all advanced workers); it focused too much on the convention and not enough on the strike and sell-out; and it was not forceful enough. A shorter, better-focused, hard-hitting CWA article (including some mention of the existence of opposition caucuses, and the need to build around a transitional program) should have been combined with several other articles: a specific box on the positions taken by labor leaders and left liberal Democratic politicians on the wage freeze, with direct quotes; a box on what the wage freeze meant to workers in the '40's and how it would affect you today; a cartoon on Lockheed or the wage-freeze-cum-profit-subsidy; an article on the Longshore strike and Bridges' refusal to openly fight Nixon's strike ban; and possibly others.

On other issues, the ASG article was more appropriate for an SL internal publication, and had little importance in a mass paper. Questions of culture were not touched on, but at least one good opportunity was missed: comment on the publication by Solzhenitsyn of an anti-communist novel on WWI (a la Dr. Zhivago) and exposing the SWP pandering to him, the Cuban Padilla and other liberal anti-Stalinists. Women's liberation and youth were not treated, but in the absence of particular event of importance, this is understandable.

We do not take the position that a mass press should be distributed only to workers. Its purpose is to build the party, and in the next period new recruits will still be drawn from cadre of petty-bourgeois origins, and experience in the youth, anti-war and women's movements. But even in recruiting the best elements from this milieu, a mass press must show its orientation towards the working class and its ability to raise the consciousness of the advanced members of the class through easily understandable, and comprehensive political, economic and theoretical commentary and reporting.

--The Mass Strike Organizing Committee