

WIN THE NEW MEMBERS

By SAM DARCY.

WE are approaching the end of the membership drive. It is too early as yet to make a thorough estimate of the drive itself. If we are to keep and even further the achievements of the drive however, we must already now find the weaknesses in our work and eliminate them. This means not only to complete the drive successfully, but also to make a thorough campaign to win the new members to active participation in Party work.

Drive Results Show Party Prestige.

Certainly it is a tribute to the prestige of our Party that our quota has been far exceeded by the number of applicants. Also we must note that the method with which we carried out the membership drive was a far more Bolshevik one than ever before, in that our approach was more than ever before on the basis of the Party's participation in actual class struggles. Possibly the most encouraging feature of the membership drive is the improved composition of the new members who have entered our Party. We have recruited already four times as many Negro workers into the Party in the New York district alone as we have ever had in our district at any one previous time. The composition by industries, by nativity, by age, and so on all reflect improvement in the Party's work in reaching the American proletariat in the basic industries.

Not Sufficiently in Factories.

There are, however, a large number of shortcomings which we must seriously consider. For example, out of the total recruited in the New York district almost half were recruited at demonstrations and not in the factories. This fact alone has brought to light a considerable number of shortcomings in our work. For example, out of the total number of those who joined our Party, 200 recruits, mostly those who joined at the demonstrations under the pressure of mass enthusiasm are not reporting for assignments to units. Although many of these will undoubtedly turn up properly, yet this is an indication that the full number listed as recruited will not actually become members. Also because of having recruited at mass meetings so large a number of members rather than in the factories, we have very few new shop nuclei as a result of the drive.

Nevertheless, this influx of new members is undoubtedly a tremendous source of added strength to our Party and our task must now be to win these new members for activity. One of the most serious problems that has been facing our Party up till now is the large fluctuation of members which prevents steady growth, commensurate at least in a measure with our recruiting efforts. Excellent proletarian elements join our ranks only to drop away after a very short time. While not justifying the fact that workers leave our organization, the political Party of the whole working class, we must yet examine the reasons for it and take measures to improve the situation.

The Life of the Unit.

The first question we must put is—Why do workers join our Party? They see us, their fellow workers, fighting the bosses as an organization, on the picket lines and in the shops. They see us fighting the police who break our strikes, in street demonstrations, etc. The almost instinctive hatred for imperialist war by the great masses makes them respond readily to the Party anti-war struggle. In this way, from the outside, the worker sees our Party only in its general fighting role in the struggle and does not see the long arduous and detailed tasks necessary to carry out in order to prepare these struggles properly.

Therefore, when they join our organization and do not find the units quite as they pictured it from the outside, especially those of

our units which function very badly, there is a tendency to drop away from activity. In fact, during the factional struggle especially, our Party lost thousands upon thousands of recruited workers because of this situation. Even now that our unit meetings and activities are taking on a better aspect since we have eliminated factionalism from them and have established healthy discussions based upon mass activity there are still a considerable number of shortcomings which tend to antagonize new members who join our Party.

At the very first unit meeting they attend they hear the use of a large number of terms which are completely foreign to their ears. These terms are necessary—they arise out of the needs of our continually developing theory. But when the worker does not understand them they appear, not something which helps him in the class struggle, but something foreign to his activity in the class struggle. Similarly, many of these new members do not understand certain procedure and decisions and activities taken up in the units. Many of our members have an attitude that we must let the new members "sink or swim." "If they catch on to the Party very well, but if they drop out then it is because they are unfit." This is basically wrong. Each unit must insure that each new member gets personal attention to help in the development of his understanding.

Win the New Members to Activity.

We must develop the idea in our Party that the mere fact that a worker signs an application card does not yet mean he is a Communist; that the signing of the application card is only a signal for the fact that the worker is willing to become a Communist, and that our Party must then take measures to win him for activity; to show him by example and by joint work how to become active.

Possibly the worst feature of our unit meetings in respect to their effect upon the new member is the "heresy hunting" which still exists in many of the units as a leftover of the old factional struggle. In those unfortunate days the aim of a discussion was not to clarify our Party membership theoretically, but rather to be able to plaster deviations on the opposite faction. Everything that a member said in the unit was taken in the spirit in which a police officer gets information from a criminal, namely, "It may be used against you as evidence." This must be radically changed. Our discussions must be of such a nature as to encourage exactly those workers who have never discussed theoretical questions before and who do not understand these questions fully to participate in the discussions. This will develop them. Errors made by these workers in the course of presenting their views must not be made the occasion for comrades to set themselves up as heroic discoverers of deviations, but rather as the occasion for friendly discussion in order to clarify the situation and win the unclear comrades to a correct point of view.

The Life in the Factory.

And finally, we must introduce into our units discussions of the conditions in the factories where the members of the units work. In this concrete fashion we can evolve methods for building up our Party in the shops and connecting our units with mass work. Up till now our approach to the question of factory work was much too general. But through this different method of handling the question it is possible to examine our work in each factory separately and involve the entire unit in the task of building up our Party there.

On the whole, we can say our membership drive has been a splendid success. With loyalty and devotion, with understanding and courage, we can carry forward the task of winning the majority of the working class.