

Our Tasks in the South

By GILBERT LEWIS.

AT the convention of the Party to be held in June many questions in relation to our work in the South will have to be taken up and given serious consideration. For instance, the gap between our ideological influence and organizational results must be overcome. The convention will have to take up and find out the reason for this. Down here the workers are radicalized, they are prepared for struggle. They listen to and agree without program—even the most backward white worker is willing to accept our program on Negro equality, agree with us that the Negro and white workers must be organized together. Yet our organizational gains have not been commensurate with this degree of radicalization.

Not An Experiment.

Let us analyze the situation and see if we can find out some of the reasons for this. The recent Plenum of our Party pointed out that no longer must the South be regarded as a sort of experimental laboratory but serious and sustained attention must be given to the work here. In many things the decision has been put into effect. The tour system (where an organizer would get into a town, get a number of workers together, call a meeting and form a nucleus only to return in a few weeks to find that it had disappeared), which greatly affected organizational results, has been overcome. Our comrades are fast coming to realize that Southern workers with practically no experience in the labor movement and many of them never before having heard of a revolutionary Party, cannot be expected to carry on long in the absence of competent leadership. It will be sometime yet before we can form nuclei after one of two meetings with workers and come back weeks later and find them functioning. (In Atlanta, a nucleus so formed, wrote in later to ask the Party to reconsider its stand on the Negro question. When this was not done the organizer resigned and the nucleus was practically dissolved).

Also the comrades in the North are overcoming what might well be termed a geographical attitude in regard to the South. They are gradually, but by no means rapidly enough, coming to realize that the South is not an isolated section of American capitalism and that the semi-feudal repressive measures now being utilized in Georgia (Powers-Carr case) and other parts of the South (lynching and burning of Negro and white workers) will, if not severely resisted, rapidly spread to other sections of the country.

Failures on May Day.

This geographicalness expressed itself in our preparations for May Day. At a time when May Day meetings, because the existing repressive measures, should have been held in every city in the South, only two can be recorded, one in Rome and one in Chattanooga. If the Central Committee truly understood the situation, it should have drained itself of forces to hold meetings in at least all of the big political centers of the South, and particularly in Atlanta. This failure to hold a meeting in the city which is taking the lead in the effort to drive our Party into illegality, where two and by now probably six more, of our comrades are facing death in the electric chair and a city which is incidentally the Wall St. of the South, was a decided setback for our Party.

In this connection it should be pointed out that organizers should at all times, give in accurate reports on which the C.C. may base its estimate of Party forces in a district. For no doubt in the case of Atlanta, the C.C., on

the basis of reports given at the Plenums to the Party units and the Left Wing Workmen's Circle group, was counting on something it did not have. What was actually there can be judged best by the fact that the Party unit no longer actually functions and the Left Wing Workmen's Circle crowd came down to City Hall on May Day with their water bills in their hands.

In other things also does the dead hand of the past weigh heavily on the present. Lack of adequate organizational preparations for staging real fights still manifests itself. An American Negro Labor Congress meeting, called in Atlanta to protest lynching, was held without any organizational preparations. It is not really true to say that the meeting was held, for all of the comrades connected with the meeting were in jail half an hour before the time scheduled for the meeting to open.

Not the Way.

Mass meetings to protest lynching cannot be arranged in this manner. The comrades must realize that lynching is one of the means of terror that the Southern capitalists do not intend to give up without a determined struggle. Any mass meeting in the South against lynching, is going to be met with the sharpest resistance by the capitalists. Without organizational preparations, meetings called to protest lynching can, and in many cases probably will, result in other lynchings. We must guard against this.

In my opinion the national office of the A.N.L.C. made a mistake in specifically declaring that there should be a Negro chairman of its Southern meetings. For while the A.N.L.C. is an organization voicing the specific racial demands of the Negro masses, on a class struggle basis, any fight against lynching must be a united front affair, united front of Negro and white workers, and not only in the audience but as speakers, chairman, etc.

In our mass work, in the building of the T.U.U.L. and revolutionary unions, much quiet determined work will be necessary in order to overcome the gap between ideological and organizational strength. There must be less mass meetings and more group and shop gate meetings. We must raise the political consciousness of the workers in the shops. For this more shop papers must be built up. The workers are with us ideologically but have not quite reached that stage where they are willing to take hold on a mass scale. We must overcome this.

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