

Before the Conventions of Our Enemies

Shop Work in the Election Campaign

By WM. Z. FOSTER.

FUNDAMENTAL to the carrying out of an election campaign based on the struggle of the workers for their daily needs is that it be centered around the shops. In past election campaigns our agitation and election work in general has been carried out on a broad territorial plan, a method inherited from the socialist party. That is, we organized our mass meetings and demonstrations pretty much on a general city-wide or neighborhood basis. The shops were left practically out of consideration. This vague system was quite in line with our loose agitation of slogans and loose methods of work generally.

But in the present campaign we must break abruptly with this incorrect approach. General meetings we must continue to have—city-wide, neighborhood, street-corner—they are very important. But they cannot be the basis of our work. This must be the shops. We must take our election campaign to the factories. We must hold thousands of shop gate meetings and carefully organized conferences of workers of given shops. Our shop nuclei must be activated in this sense. We must issue innumerable shop election leaflets and bulletins. We must build up "Vote Communist" committees on a shop basis.

By the same token, we must also bring our campaign directly to the unemployed. Our speakers, national and local, must go directly to the breadlines, flop-houses, employment agencies, relief stations, unemployment demonstrations, etc. Wherever the unemployed congregate or live these the campaign of the Communist Party in

the elections must be in evidence.

The heart of this taking the campaign to the shops and to the unemployed is that in each instance our agitation deal with the specific problems of the workers involved. If a speaker speaks at a shop gate his talk, carefully prepared, must deal with the conditions of the workers in that plant. More than that, he must give a very concrete plan of action. The same principles hold true with the work among the unemployed. Of course, such linking of the campaign directly to the workers in given shops or breadlines does not mean that it has to weaken in political content by dropping consideration of national political issues. On the contrary, the workers will the better understand these questions if they are hooked up with their most immediate grievances.

The Question of Concentration

From the foregoing it is already evident that the principles of concentration must be systematically applied in the campaign. This is necessary for the general purpose of concentration in our work. The more determinedly and definitely we apply concentration the more we will get away from the looseness and generalization which is such a major factor in preventing our securing real mass contacts. The great mass election campaign must therefore have as one of its foundations a thoroughgoing concentration. This concentration must be based upon and extend the existing concentration work.

It will be seen from the published tour dates of the proposed national candidates that a start is being made on concentration in the elections.

While all the important industrial centers of the country are being covered by these two speakers, their main work is directed to our concentration industries and localities. Periods of ten days or so are allotted for each in Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit and Pittsburgh, besides which long tours are arranged for the coal and steel districts. These tours will, in turn, be concentrated upon the most important industries and sections of industries in the places involved. This concentration of the national speaking tours must be made to result in veritable mass campaigns with special leaflets and definitely involving the unions, Unemployed Councils, etc., and build around the immediate issues of the workers involved. They must result not only in a large vote for the Party in these sections but also a big increase in its membership and a great strengthening of the non-Party mass organizations and their struggles.

The same principles of concentration should be applied in the individual localities. The general work of agitation must, of course, go ahead, but the main stress should be placed upon the most important industries and sections. In a given city it is not a case of simply picking out one factory and concentrating upon that, developing the specific demands and struggles, etc., at these points. Our forces are large enough so that we can concentrate upon many places. Our general work in the city, instead of being weakened by such concentration, will be strengthened. Every city should have its election concentration program, fitting into and elaborating present concentration programs.