
Report to the Incoming National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party on the Party Press and Publishing, Lyceum Bureau, and Party School July 27, 1919. †

by L.E. Katterfeld

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Comrades of the National Executive Committee:—

The greatest problem that confronts us as an Executive Committee is the development of efficient instruments of propaganda, education, and organization through which to reach the working class with the message of revolutionary Socialism and organize them for action.

In the past this was left almost entirely to private agencies over which the Party membership had no control. These competed with each other and with the Party, causing a tragic waste of energy and funds even where not influenced by private profit and personal ambition. Some of these private agencies had far better access to the Party's membership than even the state and national organization itself. Inevitably they diverted the attention of the comrades to their private schemes. This is one of the reasons for the small measure of success attending the work of the Party as such.

Our predecessors in office made practically no effort to solve this problem. Some of them were far

more vitally interested in these private enterprises than in the success of the movement as a whole. It is our supreme duty to consider this problem seriously and to devote our very best talents toward its solution.

To be more specific, I consider it our duty: To keep every member so well informed regarding the Party's activities that he can function intelligently; to develop active workers out of as many members as possible; to provide facilities for the education of our entire membership and the class conscious workers generally; to provide the best possible training for those that will enter the Party's service; to put to work every Party member competent and willing to give all his time to Socialism; to eliminate the waste of competition between different units and institutions of the movement and organize the entire campaign, so that instead of hindering each other and working at cross purposes each will help the other and the strength of our entire membership will unite in pile driver blows against the ramparts of ignorance upon which the power of capitalism rests.

†- Ludwig Katterfeld had personal experience in the realm of propaganda and education as head of the Socialist Party's Lyceum Bureau from its establishment in June 1911 until its discontinuation for budgetary reasons about one year later. He clearly saw himself serving the Socialist Party in a similar capacity in 1919, as this report aptly testifies. The report was prepared for the July 26-27, 1919, meeting of the incoming National Executive Committee of the SPA, the 15 individuals declared elected by the Left Wing Section on the basis of the returns gathered from 26 State Secretaries in the wake of the abrogated party election of 1919. This full group included: Dennis E. Batt, Dan Hogan, Louis C. Fraina, Kate Sadler Greenhalgh, Fred Harwood, Nicholas Hourwich, Ludwig E. Katterfeld, John Keracher, Edward Lindgren, William Bross Lloyd, Mary Raoul Millis, Patrick Nagel, Marguerite Prevey, C.E. Ruthenberg, and Harry M. Wicks. Several of these were adherents of the Regular faction and others disdained further participation in the SPA, forcing the incoming NEC to conduct its solitary session with a bare quorum of 8 of the 15 members. By the time of the August Emergency National Convention, the number of Left Wing members of the incoming NEC remaining dedicated to the mission of capturing the SPA had dwindled to a non-quorum of 6 (Greenhalgh, Harwood, Katterfeld, Lindgren, Lloyd, Prevey).

To meet these needs I propose that we establish at once, and develop as rapidly as conditions make it possible, our own Press, Publishing House, Lyceum Bureau, and Training School.

I. Party Press.

The Party press must perform several distinct functions. It must first address itself to the non-Socialist and interest him in Socialism. It must carry the news from the working class viewpoint, and bring the reader to the point of joining the Party. It must educate the party member. It must keep him informed regarding the affairs of the party and inspire him to be an ACTIVE worker. I shall consider these in their inverse order.

(a) **An Organization Paper.** As an essential for achieving the full measure of success in whatever else we may undertake we must establish an organizational organ, or *Party Builder*. This should be sent direct to EVERY member. The subscription must be included in the dues. The *Official Bulletins* issued by the National Office heretofore have been effective means of concealing the Party's business from the membership. It must be our first task to establish direct contact with the entire membership. State and sectional editions of this *Party Builder* can be issued so as to serve the needs of the State Offices as well as the National.

This organization paper can not be started too quickly. Once the membership realize what we are trying to do, they will carry the whole program through to triumphant success.

Let us decide upon this *immediately*. I am sure that we can secure enough personal subscriptions RIGHT AT THE CONVENTION to entitle us to second class mailing rates. Then request each State Office to furnish a list of its membership as quickly as possible so that before the year ends every member may receive inspiration every week through *The Party Builder*. That will do much to weld our entire organization into an effective fighting force.

(b) **Educational Journal.** We need a periodical to record and interpret the events of the worldwide

struggle for Communist Socialism, one that will educate our own membership as well as the workers generally, and constantly broaden their horizon. *The Revolutionary Age* has been doing splendid work along this line. Its editorial policy has hit the bull's-eye. I suggest that we invite the comrades of the Left Wing Section to turn *The Revolutionary Age* over to the national organization to be the Party's official organ.

Every English-reading member should receive this paper. The simplest and best plan would be for the convention to increase the regular national dues enough to cover the cost of publication and to place every member on the subscription list. If this is done it might be practicable to combine *The Party Builder* and *The Revolutionary Age* into one publication.

(c) **News and Propaganda Papers.** The time is very auspicious for the development of Socialist news and propaganda papers under Party ownership. Most of the periodicals that used to distract the attention of the comrades are either out of business or have gone over to the enemy. The membership generally is now disgusted with private ownership of our propaganda means. It is up to the Party to supply the need.

Instead of doing this planlessly, comrades starting papers helter skelter everywhere merely on impulse, then competing with each other, all trying to become national in scope with the certainty that most of them must inevitably fail, I think that our committee should survey the entire field, consider the needs of the movement, estimate the possibilities, and proceed deliberately to encourage the development of the Socialist Press along those lines.

Ultimately I think that we should have a chain of Socialist dailies covering all the great industrial centers of the United States. Our local and state weeklies should be placed and developed with this end in view. To avoid waste of competition in circulation getting, etc., each paper should confine itself to a well defined district to cut down production costs; cooperation should be arranged between all the papers in news gathering and editorial work, so that each additional paper instead of being a competitor will be a source of strength to our press.†

†- The Organization of Finnish Socialists had long made use of a very similar scheme, dividing the United States into three districts, each with its own newspaper: *Raivaaja* (The Pioneer) in the East, *Työmies* (The Worker) in the so-called Middle District, and the tri-weekly *Toveri* (The Comrade) in the West. This arrangement did not build a unified and harmonious organization, it should be noted. To the contrary, distinct factional orientations tended to consolidate around each paper, with *Raivaaja* mainline Social Democratic

As these papers achieve a sufficiently sound financial foundation and reach a certain minimum of circulation, they can then be changed into dailies, but the system of district territories and editorial cooperation should be preserved. Under this plan a chain of daily papers will have far greater chance for success than any one paper could have by itself. I believe that within a year this point can be reached with the *Ohio Socialist* or *Socialist News*, the *Chicago Socialist*, the *Oakland World*, and a number of others, so that by the time that then next national campaign becomes hot we can have a whole battery of working class dailies to meet the lies of the capitalist press. If the cooperation of existing dailies can be secured it will of course make our work easier, but this is not essential to success for the Party-owned press.

As an immediate step I suggest that we invite the managing editors of all existing Party-owned local and state papers to meet with our committee to consider with us this entire problem and if possible work out immediately the districting of the territory and a practical basis for cooperation in the business and editorial management of the Socialist propaganda press. The least that we should accomplish is the organization of a Socialist Press Organization.

(d) A General Propaganda Paper. Even under the best possible system of cooperation, because of limited circulation the production cost of local and state papers will always necessitate a rather high subscription price, and it will be difficult to get the person who is not yet interested in our movement to some extent to subscribe. We need also a national propaganda sheet which can be published at a price so low that an immense circulation can be worked up among the non-Socialists, who thereby would become “prospects” for our other papers and for our organizers.

I suggest that we immediately begin to use *The Eye Opener* for this purpose.† It should contain the best and most timely material from our other papers,

articles that would interest the NON-Socialists. It could be published monthly at 10 cents a year, or 5 cents a year in bundles. Comrades could then afford to place long lists of their friends upon the subscription list and to use it for house to house distribution and for house distribution where there are strikes. A tremendous circulation should be achieved. This would in no sense be a competitor of the local and state papers, but could be used to help advertise and establish them, acting as a “feeder” for them.

In these several ways we should begin AT ONCE to develop the Party’s **Publicity Power.**

II. Publishing House.

The National Office should be the great publishing center for the Socialist movement. Our entire party organization — State Office, local, branch, and individual member — should be organized as a distributing force for the output of leaflets, pamphlets, and books. In this way a volume of business can be developed that will cut down the production costs of Socialist literature to a fraction of what they are under the present anarchistic lack of system.

I suggest that we IMMEDIATELY invite Kerr & Company and other publishers of Socialist books that are worthwhile to state on what terms they will turn this function over to the Party, or at least cooperate with us. We should achieve for the Party Publishing House a monopoly of the publication of what are known as the standard classics of our movement. We should keep abreast of the times with the publication of new literature to supply the demand both in and out of the Party.

This does not necessarily imply the ownership of a printing plant. Kerr & Co. have never owned any machinery. Personally I believe that it would be a great advantage, but whether it is or not requires technical knowledge that none of us on the NEC possess. I sug-

while *Työmies* colored by syndicalism and in competition with a vibrant IWW Finnish language press that was even more committed to the anarcho-syndicalist cause. In the 1919 split, the more conservative *Raivaaja* stayed in the Socialist Party orbit while *Työmies* and *Toveri* went with the bulk of the Finnish Federation into the Workers Party of America. To fill the void created when *Raivaaja* parted company, a new WPA Finnish language paper was established in New York City to service the Eastern region in May of 1921, a daily called *Eteenpäin* (Forward). *Työmies* and *Eteenpäin*, still part of the Communist orbit, merged in 1950 and gradually reduced frequency, due in large part to a declining Finnish-American readership.

†- *The Eye Opener* was the Socialist Party’s national weekly which succeeded *The American Socialist* when the latter publication fell afoul of wartime postal censorship. The editor of both of these papers was J. Louis Engdahl, a Left Wing Socialist.

gest therefore that we at once engage a printing expert to submit to us as quickly as possible an itemized estimate of the cost of a printing establishment to supply our probable needs, cost of upkeep, paper, etc., and what volume of printing would be required to make it a paying venture as compared with hiring our printing done by commercial firms. Arthur Brooks did this for the NEC years ago. His conclusion was that if we made our leaflets, pamphlets, books, and periodicals all of such size as to be fractions or multiples of a certain unit size, then we would have a great enough volume of work to keep a highest speed machine busy full time, and would be able to produce more cheaply than any private firm. The matter is worth investigating.

Under this head I have also a minor suggestion. Let us publish a "Red Almanac," patterned after the Almanacs distributed free by patent medicine concerns, giving in connection with the usual calendar a chronicle of national and international events to show the inspiring spread of the red the world over, explaining recent developments in the Socialist movement of the US for the understanding of the outsider, and containing enough entertaining and humorous matter so that the average family will keep it and use it. I think that this could be produced cheaply enough so that locals and individuals would use it for free distribution, and thus advertise our publishing house and the Party as a whole.

III. Lyceum Bureau.

The National Office should be the central bureau through which all demands for Socialist speakers can be supplied. All available speakers should be listed and the needs of State Offices supplied from there. Locals and branches should be encouraged to secure their speakers and organizers through their State Offices and the Party Lyceum instead of through private agencies.

I suggest that we immediately engage individuals speakers of national reputation for booking with the larger locals and arrange at least one lecture course for the same purpose. In addition to being offered on a cash basis, those might be offered on a subscription basis in connection with the various Party-owned publications to build up their circulation and act as an

outlet for the Party Publishing House.

IV. Training School.

The Party needs thousands of trained workers, organizers, agitators, shop agents, solicitors, secretaries, etc. There is IMMEDIATE need for several hundred. We have not got them. We must develop them at once.

In the past these duties have fallen largely upon those who received special training in a capitalist environment before they become Socialists. Practiceless lawyers, pulpless preachers, and busted businessmen have almost had a monopoly of these positions and thereby influenced our movement out of all proportion to their number. The way to overcome this condition is to train up our own young people, working men and women who were Socialists first.

This training school should be started *at once*, and the cooperation of the convention delegates secured before they leave for home. An educational director should be engaged immediately to outline courses, etc. The business administration, at the start at least, could be left to the Executive Secretary and the necessary overhead expense paid from the regular receipts of the National Office. A Field Secretary should secure sufficient financial support from well to do Socialists, from units of the Party and from other labor organizations to make this school an immediately practicable proposition.

A correspondence course should also be worked out immediately and every active local and YPSL branch encouraged to take the same this winter.

As far as possible we should make use of the experience of existing schools and secure their cooperation, instead of becoming their competitors. The correspondence course work and the full time training courses of the Rand and other schools should be absorbed by the Party School, for which I would propose the name: Marx University.

When the support warrants it, the Party should extend these educational facilities and develop local schools in the principal industrial centers as branches of an International Socialist and Labor University with a view not merely to train party workers, but to educate the working class in general as much as possible before the responsibility of administering all the af-

fairs of the nation falls upon their shoulders.

The beginning for this Extension University can be made from the Party Lyceum. It can be gradually developed from the lecture courses in those centers where the local organizations make them a real success.

Each one of these four institutions — the Party Press, the Publishing House, the Lyceum, and the Training School — will be an instrument to help build the others. Developed simultaneously they will assure stability to each other. Together they may become the most influential educational force that the world has ever known. Through them and with them our Party organization, local, state, and national, should be able to measure up to its opportunities, adopt itself to whatever tactics the capitalist opposition makes necessary, and become the dominant power.

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The criticism may be made that the capitalist powers may make “laws” to prevent us from working along these lines. If they do, we may be forced to adapt ourselves, give up one line of endeavor and continue another. But until they do we should make use of all these opportunities that we have. To the extent that we develop these efficient instruments now we shall be in better shape to meet the eventualities of the future.

Others may think that the unsettled condition within the Party makes it unadvisable to make new departures. I hold that this very condition is an argument in favor of beginning this constructive work right now. Those that would have sabotaged these Party enterprises will bolt from the Party as soon as they learn that we are the majority at the convention and their position will be less dangerous because it will have to come openly from the outside. The very act of making these plans NOW, and founding these institutions in this time of crisis will give confidence to those that may waver and will rally to the banners of our Party immediately all the thousands that are in earnest in their desire for Communist Socialism. At this coming convention the Party will purge itself of Reformism, will ally itself unreservedly with the Communist International, will become in FACT the Party of the revolutionary elements of the working class of the United States. Let this historic gathering mark an end to the era of private profit connection with Socialist propaganda in the United States. From now henceforward let all that is built up through the unpaid efforts of comrades working for our Cause belong to the Party to strengthen it as an instrument for the emancipation of the working class. The inspiration of this hour will make available tremendous reservoirs of energy that have never yet been tapped for the welfare of our movement. Let us organize this energy for action.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

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