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By Its Readers

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Worker's Journal

by Charles Denby

A LAYOFF AT MY PLANT

About a month ago or better there were layoffs in the shop where I worked that shook the plant from one end to another. This was also shocking to workers in other plants throughout the city.

It was different from any other layoffs I have ever witnessed in one sense. We often expect a layoff or cutback, some minor and some severe. But it always has been in the past that we had a feeling or understanding of what the layoff is about. This one, no one seems to know.

It just happened suddenly. We heard about it that morning, and by quitting time 60 per cent of the workers had received their pay-off slips. The majority of the laid-off workers were very angry. And those that remained, remained in fear and anger. Many were saying, "What is this? What is going to happen? The depression comes this suddenly?"

DOES THE SALE OF CARS STOP AT ONCE?

The company was saying that they weren't selling any cars. The workers were saying, "Has the sale of cars ever stopped before in the history of the industry, at once?" Many of these laid-off workers were getting in groups around the jobs where they worked and were making short talks and speeches of different kinds.

A worker from the electronic department made a statement that something is seriously wrong with this layoff and with the situation in the country today. He said teasingly, "I am speaking as a big business man. With the whole threat of Communism versus democracy in the free enterprise world, it seems to me that if something wasn't seriously wrong, we big business people would try our utmost to avoid a layoff of this degree for fear of all the workers turning against us and destroying our free enterprise system. I am

Saving Labor

A woman who is a long distance operator was telling me that it was much easier for them now that the company has installed a direct dialing system to many neighboring cities.

I asked if it hadn't resulted in a lot of layoffs.

She answered, "Oh, no. It's so complicated and they have so much more paper work now, that they just transferred everybody over to filing."

Is McCarthy a Communist?

McCarthy has made a name for himself by attacking Communists. But a number of ordinary people have written us letters which show their deep conviction that McCarthy is himself the most ferocious Communist in the United States.

All sorts of learned people, historians, intellectuals, and above all, political radicals, will see in this only the ignorance and backwardness of the common people. And, as usual, these wise men will be wrong. The people know that there is a Communism which means a society organized for the

benefit of all, particularly those who work. And they know quite well that McCarthy is not one of those.

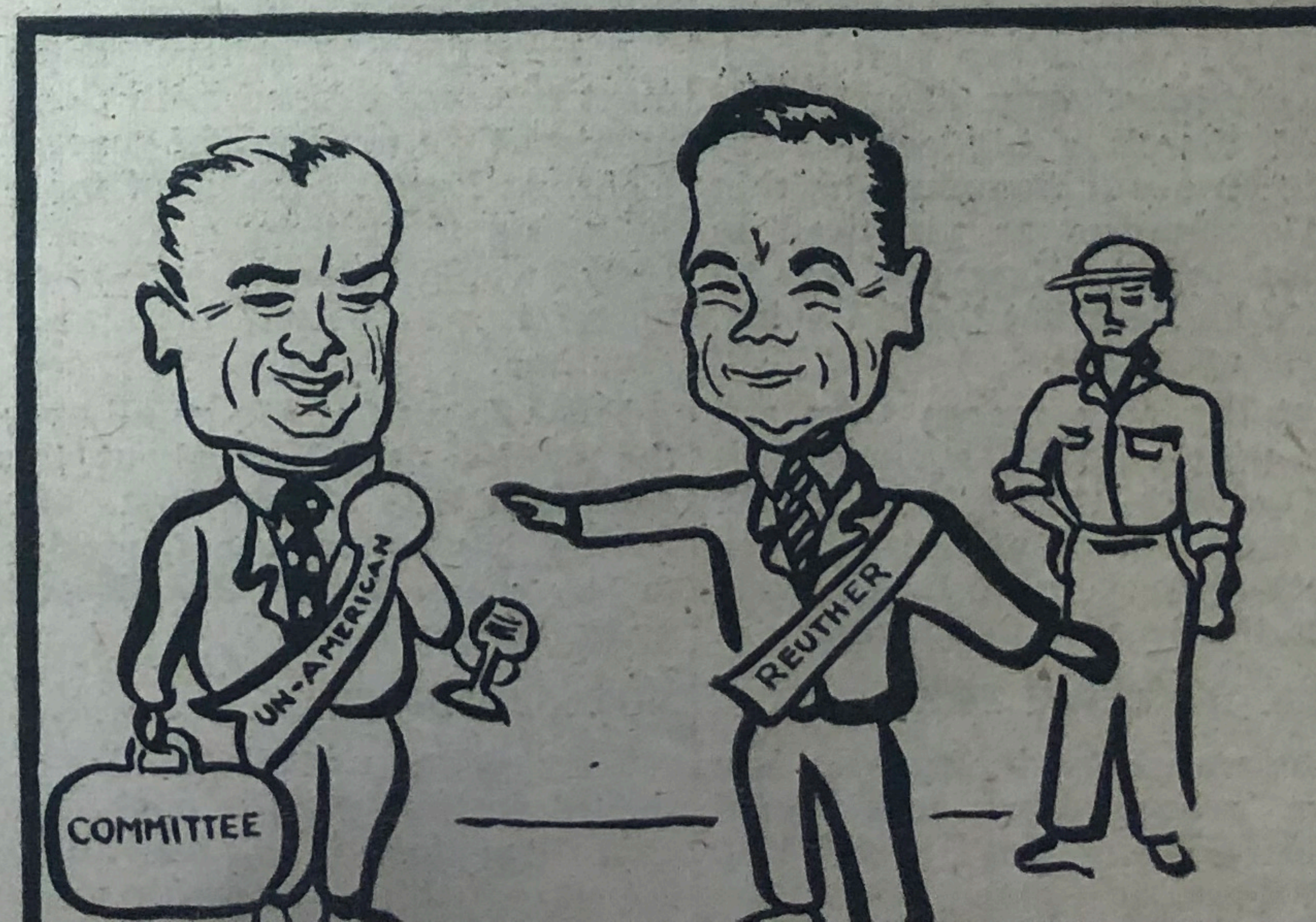
But the people know too that the Communism of Russia, of China and of all the totalitarian states, is the merciless enemy of all equality, justice and political rights for people. And many are convinced that McCarthy is a representative of this type of Communism.

BROTHER TO STALIN

CORRESPONDENCE joins heartily with them in this. McCarthy is a brother to Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, Mao-Tse-Tung, Malenkov and Franco. These are big boys who sit, or have sat, at the big table. McCarthy is a little one, cheap, snot-nosed, and with nothing more to him than a big greedy voice. But he belongs to the same family. And that family will have to be destroyed or it will carry our civilization to utter collapse and ruin.

You cannot judge these fellows by the things they say. Hitler used to swear that the greatest enemy of the world was Communism. But what was distinctive about his government was

Jurisdictional Dispute



Discussion

The Real Trouble
We Solve This or Fail

I have lived with and worked with CORRESPONDENCE from the time some of us first thought of the paper years ago. Also, I have been around a long time, in all types of organizations and have taken my part in publishing and writing for all sorts of newspapers written for the people. For me the fate of the paper hangs on one question — can intellectuals and workers work together to produce a workers' paper? Can we control the perpetual conflict between them?

This must sound very strange. A reader of CORRESPONDENCE can well say, "But every page, almost every column of your paper points out that in Russia, in Britain, in the CIO, in the UAW, in the Communist Party, in governments and popular organizations all over the world, the intellectuals, the organizers, the politicians dominate and suppress the people. And now you say that in your own organization the same thing exists. How come?"

The conflict not only exists. It dominates every single thing that we try to do. I repeat. If the paper succeeds, it will be because we have succeeded in overcoming it. If we fail, this will be the cause.

It Concerns Everyone

We state this quite openly for two reasons.

1. This paper, CORRESPONDENCE, is written, edited and circulated by its readers. The only possible way of tackling this problem is by making it public and having everybody who is concerned with the paper take part in solving it.

2. It is precisely this problem which the workers face in industry, in Labor Parties, in trade unions, in the organization of society as a whole and in the organization of every detail of society. It has us by the throat because it has every mass organization in the world by the throat. The people of the world will solve it or the whole civilization will crash to ruin. Our experience is a small one but it concerns everybody.

We have to begin by defining the very terms that we are using.

We say a workers' paper. CORRESPONDENCE is not yet a workers' paper. But there is no other workers' paper in the country at all. Not one.

Intellectuals. By intellectuals we mean those who have not been organically workers all their lives. The intellectuals (I am one) have this in common, that they read a great many books and newspapers and write and speak freely. Some of us have a long experience of radical politics in political organizations. Some of these intellectuals are working in plants and have been working in the plant for years. But they remain intellectuals nevertheless.

Rank and File Workers

In contrast with the intellectuals we have workers, rank and file workers, people who have been workers all their lives and will never be anything else but workers. We have noticed that the women in our organization have attitudes to things very similar to these workers. And the very young

people, even where they are university students, do not have the intellectual attitude. The Negroes too belong to this grouping. So that we have, on the one side, the intellectuals, the experienced politicians, and on the other, rank and file workers, women, Negroes and the youth.

Now our intellectuals from hard and bitter experience with other papers know that only workers can produce a workers' paper. We practice what we preach. It is the intellectuals who proposed that the editor of the paper should be a working man. He left some 15 years of working in the plant to become editor, editing CORRESPONDENCE.

Charles Denby, our brilliant columnist, works in the plant and never wrote a line for publication in his life until he started to write his column. The same is true of Marie Brant. These three are the foundation of CORRESPONDENCE and not a line goes into the paper which the editor does not approve (though he may disagree). What then is the trouble? Let me give one example.

Editorial Meeting

There is an editorial meeting of three people to discuss an article. It consists of a working man as chairman, one woman who has worked in the plant for years and still works there but is an intellectual, and one intellectual of great knowledge and political experience. Nothing could be better. The question before them is an article on McCarthy, on some aspect of the McCarthy business.

The worker in the chair says that he does not think that the paper should concern itself too much about McCarthy. The workers, he says, are not afraid of McCarthy. If McCarthy attempted to touch the working class he would get a mass of blows. And having expressed this opinion briefly, he stops. The politically experienced intellectual says, "But it is not a question of McCarthy as such. There is the question of the freedom of the press which McCarthy is trying to strangle. This affects everybody including workers."

The worker replies, "The workers are not particularly interested in freedom of the press." The politically experienced intellectual says at once, "But that is absolutely untrue, and even if it were true it is the duty of the paper to point out to the workers that freedom of the press is a matter of life and death for the country as a whole and for the workers more than anybody else." The discussion continues.

Worker Is Convinced

Now the politically experienced intellectual has strong and powerful arguments. In fact they are absolutely unanswerable. Nobody in the whole wide world could argue against them. The woman who has worked in the plant for years feels that something is wrong but she thinks that here the worker is wrong.

Now comes the most dangerous part of the whole business. In the end, the worker is himself convinced by their

arguments, that it is imperative to have an article in the paper in which the dangers to freedom of the press which McCarthy represents should be exposed.

This article appears. But when it comes out, with few changes, it could have appeared in the anti-McCarthy New York Times, which is a conservative paper, in the liberal New York Post, in the Socialist New Leader, in the Communist Daily Worker and in all the Trotskyite papers.

It is a very good article. The only thing wrong with it is that it means nothing at all to the vast majority of the workers in the country. If CORRESPONDENCE does not say what the workers think, not only does it not deserve to exist. It certainly will not continue to exist.

It Is Criminal

The criminal thing is that the worker chairman did not say what he thought, that what he thought did not go into the paper. He knows workers, he has lived among them all his life. He spoke out of a tremendous depth of experience, of workers experience. You can be certain that if he thinks as he does, a whole lot of other workers think the same. It is to say what they think that we have started this paper.

Let us take the most extreme possibility. Suppose that he is "wrong." Why shouldn't the workers be "wrong"? But is he "wrong"? I can say that after 25 years of hard work and constantly studying the workers' movement, in theory and practice, I have arrived at this conclusion. Whenever a worker of some political understanding says something that contradicts what I, as an intellectual, think, I do not correct him, I do not argue with him. I ask him to tell me more. I do not interrupt him. I listen. And when he has said all he has to say, and I have questioned him with the sole purpose of finding out what he is driving at, I ask him to write his views down. I spend days and weeks thinking it over.

His Views Matter

My experience, and it has taken me years to learn this, is that as a rule, what he is talking about, I am usually not talking about at all, and that what he is talking about is what matters.

Take this very example. He said, "The workers are not afraid of McCarthy." And he more than implied that inasmuch as the workers were not afraid of him he didn't see why the paper should concern itself about that loud-mouth. Now in one sense he is undoubtedly wrong, and very wrong. A paper which deals with politics cannot afford to ignore a political phenomenon like McCarthy. And a thousand political writers in a thousand little political papers know this and can preach sermons on it.

But what this worker was saying amounted to this. "Eisenhower is afraid of McCarthy. All the liberals and intellectuals and middle class New Dealers are in terror of McCarthy. We, the workers are not. And that is what I want in our workers' paper. For it is in no other paper. I know that is what the workers think and I want them to read it here."

(Continued on p. S4, Col. 1)

Who We Are - What We Stand For

Some people have asked what the purpose of our paper is and what is behind the publishing of such a paper. We want to say clearly who we are and what we stand for.

We are a group of people from different parts of the country. Some of us are factory workers, housewives, members of minority groups, students and domestic workers. Others of us are intellectuals and professionals. All of us have seen how disgusted people are with politics and we wanted to be a part of a movement for new relations and understanding between people. We have brought everything that each of us has as an individual — the experience of workers and the study and education of intellectuals — to CORRESPONDENCE.

Before we started out to build a paper, some of us belonged to groups that said they stood for "rights of working people, minority groups, women and youth." They had the attitude that workers were backward and had to be taught to be able to change anything. Those small groups were going to teach them how. The only change they wanted was to be in the place of those in authority now. We had entirely different ideas about workers in our own group and outside it. Because of this we left them.

The World We Live In

Our ideas came from intellectuals studying what was happening all over the world and from workers in our group saying what they thought.

The one thing that separates our world today from any time before is the discipline that every person faces in his daily life. In plants of thousands and shops of ten and 20 workers, in offices, in unions, in schools and in the army, people in authority tell others what to do and what not to do.

Wherever people have turned to organize themselves in the last years they have been faced with this, that the so-called leaders turn against them. You will hear many people say that there is no leadership today, only discipline, and asking why is this so. No one has to know much about unions to know that they are not controlled by their membership, and yet they are the only formal organizations today that represent the working person.

The Life of Ordinary People

American working people want a change. They built these organizations to bring about relations between people that were free of this discipline, so that in plants and in neighborhoods they would work together without interference and red tape and orders. They do not go along with what is happening today. They are not interested enough in politics to vote or sometimes even to remember the names of the big wheels, let alone listen to what they have to say. Ordinary people, as much as they can, live a life of their own. They think their own thoughts. These were the only politics we cared about.

Publishing A Paper

These are the ideas we started out with. But ideas mean nothing unless you act on them. We formed our own group and started a paper as the only way of saying and practicing what we thought. If we wanted a change in the rest of the world, and we believed others did too, we had to do something about it.

We started with a mimeographed paper, and for eighteen months we took it to work with us and to our neighborhoods. We practiced putting out a paper. Most of us knew nothing about the technical side of the newspaper business, layout and format. But we knew if we left it to professionals, we would not have the kind of paper that workers in our group and their friends wanted. If this paper suited them, it would suit middle class and professional people as well.

In October, 1953, we began to print our paper. We had a small group and we could not do it alone. But we had confidence in our ideas and that people were looking for a paper like this. We would go to every person we knew and ask for their help, to write for, to circulate and to subscribe to CORRESPONDENCE. Most important we would go to workers. If they made it the kind of paper they would want to read, we would get the kind of paper everyone wanted to read, and felt the need for.

The editor must be a worker himself. What he had to learn about the newspaper business, he would learn. With his experience as a man who had spent his life in plants and with people like himself, he could, as no professional could, edit the paper in the direction that we wanted it to go.

Every Section of the Population

We established editing committees in all parts of the country where we had people. This is the way they work: articles are brought in, the whole committee discusses and edits and proposes other articles. Each group edits a particular section of the paper: Labor, Negro, Women, Youth, Viewing and Reviewing, Coal and Its People. In that way every section of the population expresses itself in our paper.

Some of Our Problems

We started off with people saying what is today, what never appears anywhere, the details of everyday life, our politics. One of the hardest things we had to do was to convince people that what they thought counted. Some of the people we came in contact with, couldn't believe that we wanted them to say what they thought. Some felt what they thought as individuals was just "one man's opinion." We have broken this down to some degree. Workers found it hard to sit down and write. They could talk an article better than writing one. All of us became secretaries for our friends.

Intellectuals found it difficult to understand workers and what they said. It was not easy for intellectuals to give their knowledge and experience to people who never write and some who don't do much reading. We are working this out.

These are some of the problems we have. We, with our readers, will work them out. We have no "political program." Our only program is building this kind of worker's paper. To continue to do this, it takes the support of all of our readers. One of our young friends said that the feeling for a change is in everybody. All you have to do is bring it out. That is the purpose and the politics of our paper.

The Real Trouble

(Continued from page S1, Col. 3)

And that is neither right nor wrong. It is a fact. And it is a fact of profound importance. Because it shows the absolutely opposed attitudes of fundamental classes in the nation to the same thing. And that above all is what CORRESPONDENCE exists for. A hundred other chattering papers have chattered about McCarthy. Why should we add another piece of chatter?

Workers Have No Press

The blunt statement, "The workers do not care about freedom of the press," is even more startling. And he added, "The workers have no press to care about." Now it is an astonishing thing that we should miss the significance of that. Because that is exactly why we started CORRESPONDENCE.

People sometimes laugh in a superior fashion at our insistence on the fact that the great majority of the common people in the United States have nowhere to express what they themselves think. There are people enough who are only too ready to jump up and say what the workers think, and many others who are even more ready to tell the workers what they ought to think.

Our Claim to Support

But the plain blunt statement, "We have no press. Why should we, in our little paper, excite ourselves and try to excite people about freedom of the press? All others are doing that. Let them do that. They have something to defend. Or they think they have. That is their business."

The more I think of it, the more I see that our paper, front page, back page and center should have been plastered with articles saying precisely this. That is what CORRESPONDENCE exists for. If we do not exist for that, we have no right to exist. It is on that ground that we claim public support. We have no other claim to support.

Now what happened in this case is happening every day, every single hour, wherever our supporters and people who sympathize with us, meet to discuss the paper, articles for the paper, what to put in the paper, how to sell the paper, how to raise funds for the paper. People come down to discuss the paper, three people, six, nine people. They come because they like the paper, they like the idea of the paper, they want to contribute to the paper, they have things to say which they want said and they know that they will be said only in CORRESPONDENCE. But only very slowly and painfully can we make progress.

Can We Escape It?

Here I have stated the case. I have made a beginning. I want now to state a few more points to help the discussion.

Why does this happen to us of all people?

It happens to us because this division between intellectuals and workers is the most powerful characteristic of modern society. Modern society rests on it, is held together by it, is being ruined by it. Who are we to think we can escape it?

The intellectual, however deep his antagonism to the blunders and crimes of our society, cannot change his mental attitudes, his social character. It would be disastrous if he tried to do so. The workers who associate with us do not want him to do so.

First Saw the Need

It is the intellectuals and the experienced politicians who out of their knowledge and experience recognized what was wrong with all these old organizations and their determination to lead workers. It is the intellectuals who from their very knowledge and reading, particularly in history and economics, can most clearly describe the total bankruptcy of the society in which we live. They first saw the need for a paper like CORRESPONDENCE, they proposed it, they outlined what it was not to be.

The big press, the little radical press, an innumerable and varied gang of other types of intellectuals with an immense amount of money and opportunities at their disposal, are always seeking out workers to corrupt them with false information and false logic. Day in, day out, in press, radio, television, in union papers, these fellows are at it and are often well paid for doing it too. The Communists alone tell more lies in one day than all the old political parties used to tell in a month.

It is the intellectuals, few as we are, who are in a position to deal with the most important of these questions and fortify the workers against this incessant assault upon them.

What Workers Know

Our workers know this. They know the value of what the intellectuals have done and what they do. They depend upon the intellectuals. But that is one root of the trouble. The worker knows what the intellectuals can never know. He knows what workers think and what workers want. That is not written anywhere in books. It is something that is just forcing its way from the workers' consciousness into the light of day.

Nobody knows or can possibly know, not even the workers themselves, where this will end. It has been proved over and over again that when the French Revolution began, not a single soul in France had ever written the word "republic" for France, far less "democracy." Yet three years afterwards, the king was in jail, and as we showed in No. 10 of CORRESPONDENCE, the workers had discovered democracy. It is obvious they had been thinking along these lines.

Now we want in CORRESPONDENCE, as we say repeatedly, to find out along what lines the people are thinking. But whatever the worker is thinking independently, one thing is absolutely certain. He is not thinking what intellectuals have learned in books. It is new. It is only half-formed. He is feeling his way, he isn't sure of it. As he goes along, thinking, speaking or writing, he naturally turns to those intellectuals whom he knows, from whom he has learned so much and who, he knows, have the same aims as he does.

We Must Listen

The intellectual must be on guard, ceaselessly on guard, to listen and spend as much time and energy on a worker's statements, sometimes uncertain, sometimes blunt, as he has spent on books. Otherwise not only does the intellectual not understand. He brings forward his own ideas, and the end is the same old stuff, the very stuff all the liberal papers are full of and which the worker is doing his best to break through.

We had a large example. Here is a small one which appeared in CORRESPONDENCE (No. 13). A worker who had just begun to take an interest in CORRESPONDENCE took the paper to his home town. His friends

called him a Communist at sight and he replied to them that joining the committee to write for the paper and to sell it "hadn't changed him any." Soon they were all friendly again.

On his return to town, he asked an experienced politico if he had done right. The politico said, "No." The point is worth much discussion. But the answer should have been: "You are a worker. They are workers like yourself. Handle it your own way, make your own experience, and then tell us how it works out."

It happens all day long, at every discussion, at every meeting. Some of us knew it in all the old parties. Workers have joined them in thousands and left them—and this is the main reason. The most destructive consequence is not that they leave. It is that those who stay accommodate themselves to the superior knowledge and understanding and political skill of the intellectuals. That way lies death.

Long Hidden Talent

Here are a few facts which I have selected from hundreds. They are shocking to read, but we state them because we at least recognize them.

One of our workers has worked devotedly with us for ten years. She has a wide and varied experience of the South, the East, the West, and an immense knowledge of life in the United States. She has never written one article for the paper. A few weeks ago she listened to a newcomer speaking at a meeting and told a friend afterwards that she wished she could stand up and say what she had to say, like—After ten years.

One of the most remarkable things that has happened to us is the discovery of exceptional literary talents among our workers. One or two of them who cannot even spell, write at the drop of a hat like trained and experienced journalists. Two of our finest and most successful pamphlets have been written by such people. The trouble was not to get them to write. No, our difficulty was to prevent the educated, trained, experienced intellectuals from first "recognizing" their faults, instructing them, educating them, in other words, ruining their natural gift for style. A stern fight had to be waged to beat off the intellectuals from these natural writers. I shall relate this in a future issue.

This Is Modern Politics

Let no one underestimate the significance of what is written here. This, and precisely this, is modern politics. I shall return to it again and again. We don't know too much about it. But at least we understand the problem.

Some of the sellers of CORRESPONDENCE report that they meet many people who are sympathetic to the paper and wish us well, but they say that they don't read, they don't want to read, they know nothing about Reuther or Stevenson and they don't want to know.

Are these people ignorant, stupid, backward? Or are they profoundly convinced that all the politics in all the papers doesn't mean a single thing to them, will never mean anything to their lives, and they will have nothing to do with it all, not because they are stupid but because they see through the whole gigantic fraud that politics is.

With CORRESPONDENCE we are making every day an experience, on a small scale, but with far-reaching implications. Make it with us.

The floor is open.

R. M.

Choosing the Editorial Board

It has taken me some time to get down to this letter. It should have been written some five months ago, right after we met to prepare the printed paper. You said to me at the time, wasn't it a wonderful meeting. All I said in reply was that I would write a letter, because to me it was not a wonderful meeting.

Building From the Top Down

To me the way we chose the National Editorial Board was a disgrace in the face of what we have been talking about and talking about all these years. We repeated and repeated that within those closest to ordinary working people lies the theory and impulses to build the paper. This to me means building from the top down, beginning from the top.

The National Editorial Board must reflect the different layers in the group. If that layer which is the deepest because it is closest to ordinary working people is not a part of the National Editorial Board in setting policy, line, direction, then it is just a sounding board and protectorate for the National Editorial Board.

This deepest layer is capable of assuming leadership. There is no sense in talking it unless you mean it. For lack of a better word—no, it's the word I want to use—the deepest layer should see itself in the leadership, it should be represented. This layer wants to take responsibility for the paper. But it can't do that unless what it thinks and says, the whole group takes responsibility for, beginning with the National Editorial Board.

As far as I can see, less than half the people at that meeting took our ideas about this deepest layer seriously. They were the ones who voted for the other working woman who was a candidate for the Board.

Freedom of Choice

There was a talk about how we should choose freely. Those in positions of responsibility shouldn't interfere in terms of speaking for individuals. I agreed that it should be that way. But I think there should have been no stating of preferences publicly or privately. You told me that if one auto worker was willing to be on the Board, there would be no question of his being chosen, because everybody knew how you felt about his being on it. I felt you were wrong in carrying on that way, because he becomes your choice and not the choice of the whole group.

I don't think that this has anything to do with the fact that he would have been the choice of the group if he had been willing to be a candidate.

This analysis has been taken from a letter written to a member of the National Editorial Board by a young woman worker.

He said the reasons he didn't want to be were: he wanted to give those now responsible two more years, and he had not had enough experience to recognize political tendencies. I don't accept that as an explanation. There were other reasons, he just isn't saying.

Can't Just Talk

I think that those with authority and experience should have stated how they felt about having a person from this deepest layer on the National Editorial Board. They should have stated, "Taking our ideas seriously is demonstrating what we have been talking about over the years."

You told me in an informal discussion that those with authority were divided on this issue. They could be divided on the question of who. That is legitimate for everyone. But on the question of a representative of this layer on the National Editorial Board there should have been no division, nor no question.

You see, what sticks in my mind is that we talk, talk, talk for years about this. Then the time comes when you can say, "Here is a position where you lead, where what you think, you will take responsibility for, and so will we." One housewife came up to me after the results and said she was mad that I didn't get on. She was not disappointed, nor unhappy, but angry. It was anger all right, it was political anger.

When I heard the results, I kept thinking, we were just talking, just talking. Workers—sounding board. Workers—protectorate.

No Live Link

As a result, the National Editorial Board, the most important group of people for the paper, has no live link to what the deepest layer is thinking. What a person from this layer thinks about the paper and building it is different from every person on the Board now. We have not got on the National Editorial Board in a responsible and business-like capacity what this layer has to bring to the paper. And we won't get it with this playing around with "sitting in." You can't have people who have been around for years sitting in. They have been around long enough to take responsibility for what they say. A comparatively new person, sitting in, would be there for the purpose of learning our methods. Those are the reasons for anyone to "sit in."

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