

CYBER POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Questions for discussion

How are you using social media to build the party in your district?

Based on your use of our current online and social media resources, what feedback do you have for us? What could we be doing better?

How do we make our work in the battle of ideas more engaging? How can we get people to listen/read, think with, and talk about our materials—beyond just clicking ‘like’ or ‘share’?

Historical background

Joe: Redesign of PA—popular emphasis in PA. Should have been focusing on social media instead of on print. Didn’t really get it until 6 or 7 years ago. Where should the brunt of our resources go?

During redesign of PW and website, built a lot of sections into website: events, activism,

After last convention, set up FB groups for sharing PW articles. Very labor intensive.

“We are the Communist Party” campaign—developed FB advertising strategy

Last couple of years, use of memes (images)

Reach around 600,000/yr. Upload content 2-3 times a week (not more frequently to avoid conflict w/ PW). Somewhere between 700-1000 people

Our approach to social media is to develop engagement that takes people from FB/Twitter to website—that’s how you grow circulation. FB and Twitter are becoming principal sources of recruitment.

Big challenge is that we don’t have active user engagement among party membership and leadership. We need people to respond to comments.

Two parties: one of boomers in clubs (2000-3000); isolated members in small towns (4000-5000). We struggling to bring that large section into our work and our movement. But we also need to fight to engage our clubs, districts, and leadership in use of social media. We believe in the Leninist principle of building the party around the press.

Comments

—Importance of sharing something personal. When people first started joining online, we had an attitude left over from the McCarthy period (mistrust, etc).

—Silly stuff on Twitter and YouTube. Why aren’t we doing that to get millions of followers?

—Book, “Re-imagining Change” (one picture can really have an impact). Powerful photos and stories. Would like to see each district do a hands-on training. Importance of mobile devices. Wants to use Instagram, closed FB group. Got union members to make FB live videos and post them on the governor’s and reps’ FB pages.

—Use free resources, how to make best use of FB. Signal: free message system, highly encrypted. YouTube and Twitch channels; Twitter. Ello (anti-capitalist FB). Ability to connect with groups involved in mutual aid work.

—Big online membership, but what does it count for? Events have to be in real life, too. A lot of people still join through personal contact—inviting people to join things, texting. Real life connections. Need to develop activists—national platform where you can type in a zip code and find actions. Need an Instagram for photos

—What kind of behavior do we want to see from people that connect with us? Petitions, send a message to members of congress, phone calls or personal letters are more impactful

—How do we get our stuff at the top of the search results list on google? How do we “game the system” to get our stuff in front of people’s eyes?

—Not so much recruitment of party members, but people looking for Marxism. We could be more public about this—let people know there actually is a party. Celebrate ourselves through social media.

—Hesitant to rely on analytics from FB. If we are [not] doing things in real life, what will we put on FB? Everything comes back to personal touch.

—Our goal is activism. Party-building happens both face to face and on social media—and goes back and forth between both. Many new clubs have been organized through social media. Use one to complement and build the other. Being public is a very important part of it.

—Arab Spring: revolution of the keyboard. Things becoming more visual. Live video every day. People listen more than they read. WhatsApp groups! FB live is powerful.

—How can we get people together in KS? Set up webinars/online meetings. “Who would like to hear a message from the Communist Party?” Need to influence people who will never join the party.

—Organize a FB group/Google group for social media planning. Record PW articles for soundcloud. How we use social media depends on what we’re trying to do.

Think of how-to videos for instruction on social media. Remind people to organize watch parties on FB for webinars, etc.

BUILDING CAMARADERIE: CPUSA CLUB LIFE

Southern Illinois: Club had good results from supporting a strike, was thanked by the union. Club wore pins identifying themselves as Party members.

Pennsylvania: Advertises club meeting from first floor building with signs in window, meeting is open to all. Club is member of May Day USA coalition, allows for networking. Studying of classics is popular.

Houston: Civil Rights and Trade Union Movement is club's concentration. Exec is multi-racial; members join other organization, establish relationships which sometimes end in recruitment.

Massachusetts: A small club that relates to people where they are. Members think independently but are guided by party positions. They practice collectivity and value trust and friendship with single minded unity.

People's World: Efforts to reach internet recruits difficult, asked if there is any proven way to make contacts with on line members.

California: Club issues invitation for members to join webinars, members receive what the club meetings will be about. Club continuously reach out to members who do not attend meetings.

Houston: suggested that members should some times be invited to have coffee or lunch to have an individual meeting.

Dallas: Ask people to participate in direct action rather than attend a club meeting. Group discussions around T.V. shows such as Deep Space Nine is popular.

Queens, New York: Call and text people to attend meeting, they attempt to determine what members are interested in. Club participate in mass demonstrations with hammer and sickle banner. They support picket lines, but not with the banner. Member convince people not to cross the line, better than strikers and that is appreciated by strikers.

St. Louis: Do not have club meetings, use protest as meetings. Theirs is a cadre organization. They have a committee to organize events. Have punk shows once a month, sometimes vegan pot luck dinners anyone is welcome to take part.

LEARN HERE: MARXIST EDUCATION

1. We are involved in many simultaneous struggles: Ideological, economic, political and organizational struggles. As communists, what is our special role in the ideological struggle?

Our role in promoting democracy and a democratic approach to things. The whole history of our CP has focused on democracy; in the trade union movement and other movements we have fought for democratic process; it has to be very central to everything we do and needs to be studied and taught.

Communists bring class consciousness to the working class, including understanding that working class is not now in power in the US and therefore needs to come to power; We also bring the understanding that working class is international.

Bringing understanding that working class and government can own and control factories and other enterprises, that democratic public ownership is a possibility and neoliberalism is not the only economic possibility

2. What has been your experience with Marxist education on a club, district, regional, or national level? What worked? What didn't? How can we improve in this area? How do we build the party from these efforts?

what's worked: using existing literature and adapting and connecting to contemporary situations; bringing understanding that state plays a coercive role; that capitalism is a worldwide economic system, not just a state system; we need to incorporate the vast array of Marxist materials out there, in Science and Society and elsewhere.

what's worked: allowing people to take up topics of interest to them and basing discussions on that; one thing lacking was engagement with material that gave concrete analysis and with the classic texts and how to apply them to contemporary situations

—In our clubs we haven't had ideological discussion for a while, in this socialist movement lots of people, especially young, are interested in Marxism and what it has to say about contemporary issues; we need to talk about how to spread Marxist education; we need literature available at events and tabling, both classics and recent books

—We need technical help in presenting webinars, developing slide shows, etc.; we need tools, e.g., videos, PowerPoints, etc. for self-study and club educationals

—What we can do that DSA doesn't do: Marxist education, including showing movies like Salt of the Earth and an educational on Manifesto; these were successful. A series on "Capital "didn't work so well; now trying What is Marxism by Emile Burns; may try making educationals topical rather than simply based on one text

—Every club meeting starts with 15-20 minute educational, to which we invite guests; we have a socialist study group organized through Meetup; this leads to recruitment; we develop PowerPoints and share them throughout Texas clubs by shared drive

3. How can we integrate our practical political experience into Marxist education?

Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* can help us develop education relevant to people, relevant to what's happening to them and what can make a difference in their lives

We can make use of current educational methods such as learn by doing; project-based learning; preparing educational material can be part of the educational experience, e.g., making PowerPoints that we can bring to other groups: Rootstocks is a model

if you run for local office, you can teach others how to run; do something practical and then teach others how to do it

teaching political economy using working experience for examples; the nature of work has changed and we need to have people educate us about what's going on so we can update our Marxist education; respond to major interest in environmental issues: Engels says that dialectics is the science of universal interconnection, this is largely accepted today, ecology offers many illustrations of dialectical experience, e.g., punctuated equilibrium in evolution, relate education to what people already know

education to understand local power structures—who are the power players now and how Marxism illuminates how to change those structures

4. The Education Committee has set as its goal to make the Party the “go-to” organization in the country for Marxist education. How do you think we can reach this goal?

—we haven't had Marxist education in club because we haven't gotten resources or encouragement from Party; we need educational resources

what would it mean to be the go-to organization for Marxist education? what are the concrete steps we could take toward that goal?

—we need to bring back a Marxist theoretical journal; we started a Marxist journal called Cosmonaut with only a few thousand dollars from a patron (see Cosmonaut blog)

—we need to be a source for resources from ourselves and others, we can be a portal to online Marxist resources; have PW link to webinars and other educational materials. We can help organize what already exists.

—Organize the website. Organize materials into topics. Make the materials on the website more accessible, improve the search engine.

—have local events that combine social events with education, as done in the Niebyl-Proctor Marxist Library in Oakland on Juneteenth and other occasions

—providing fact checking, e.g., a document debunking myths about China that links to sources

—public Marxist classes in Puerto Rico are offered twice a year, topics have included Origin of Family, etc., by Engels; we have three different groups for people at different levels of study and understanding

Set up a listserv (or Discord channel?) to continue this discussion.

Topics suggested for future webinars or educational materials:

Historical materialism and world systems theory

Strategies of development in the socialist countries

Cultural politics, dialectics, Antonio Gramsci

Intro to Marxism

Re-run Marxist dialectics

Role of organized religion in political organization (real meaning of “opus”)

Marxism and sports

Workers of the world unite—1st step is, CPs of the world unite, consciously!

Dialectical materialism made understandable and relevant

“The Working Day” (from Capital)

The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State

My Car Has Better Insurance: Healthcare Workshop

—The current healthcare system more and more exists to turn money over to giant for-profit hospitals, and big pharma. The CP can help make this clear to Americans by presenting facts.

—Healthcare workers are not the enemy—many are overworked and experience moral outrage at not being able to meet the standards of care they know are necessary for healthy outcomes.

—The V.A. system is an example of a national health system. It delivers good care but there are not enough centers to meet the need.

—The CP, nationally and locally, can weigh-in on the issue.

—Individual CP members can work in coalition with others to support the Green New Deal.

NO HUMAN BEING IS ILLEGAL: IMMIGRATION

1. Comrades need to be aware that when it comes to building the Party by working within the immigrant rights movements, that for those that we work with that are undocumented, for them to join the Party it could affect their ability to legalize later.
2. In addition to the above, when working with those that are “Lawful Permanent Residents,” joining the Party will prevent them from becoming a US citizen, since the question as to whether they are not or have ever been a party member is asked at the Naturalization interview and if the answer is yes, they will be denied citizenship.
3. Even if someone naturalizes, if they become a Party member within 5 years of becoming a citizen, the naturalization will likely be revoked if it becomes known.
4. We should be distributing our Immigration Myths and Facts pamphlets!
5. We should be involved in actions to support the Dream and Promise Act of 2019
6. We should have copies of the “Red Cards” available from the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, which makes the undocumented population aware of what rights they have if confronted by ICE.

REDS FOR ED: THE FIGHT FOR K-12 EDUCATION

Discussion Questions

Micro Scale:

1. What ideological work do you need to do?
2. What logistical issues do you need to solve?
3. What partnerships could you leverage to support your work?
4. What role does the local union play? How do we move toward adopting social justice unionism? (<https://www.rethinkingschools.org/magazine/special-collections/the-role-of-teacher-unions/social-justice-unionism>)

Macro scale:

1. How can teachers more effectively be public pedagogues? How do we enter the terrain of public discourse about social reality and Party interests (social justice/change)?
2. How do we model informed risk-taking citizenship?
3. How do we show acts of material solidarity with oppressed and marginalized people?
4. How do we combat the current trend in U.S. toward for-profit education, charter schools?

—Redefine “quality” in terms of education?

*Equity in funding

*How are families in transition (homeless) supported?

—Use Pedagogy of the Oppressed; teach critical pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching.

—Promote social justice unionism. Model it. Work together toward social justice.

—End the culture of silence. As a Party we can fight against the centrality of standardized testing. Meet kids where they are with teaching that is developmentally appropriate.

*all kids need to learn using gifts, talents, interests. Again: culturally responsive teaching vs. standardized testing.

—Work toward equity “from the start.” Need for pre-K funding for all students.

—Make sure our elected leaders know the needs, know the disparities.

—Demand smaller classrooms. One of the first things to change would be class size.

—Directly address prejudicial attitudes. It should be a priority of both unions that the teaching focus be anti-racial and multi-cultural.

—We need an Education Bill of Rights for our country. What are our responsibilities?

—Oppose privatization of schools (charters)

—Stress literacy at a young age

—Be pro-disability: stand up for the rights of people with disabilities, especially be aware of the autistic community's needs.

—Replace Betsy Dallas as a priority.

—No merit-based pay.

—Create restorative justice systems

—CPUSA members should run for school boards, get on committees in their districts

LABOR: STAND TOGETHER OR FALL FOR ANYTHING

- Influence elections. Unions need to raise issues into discussion.
- Host dinners, local gatherings, bring together unionists and candidates. Create a space for discussion.
- Join something. If not a union, Working America, Jobs With Justice, etc.
- Analyze how to deal with automation and job loss, job change as industry change.
- Have a structured, united voice from the Labor Commission.
- Create a Communist Party bank.
- Conduct regional meetings.
- Start training/mentorship programs
- Create a reporting space so we know what is happening all across regions/industries.
- Talk about temp agencies.

STUDENTS AREN'T FOR PROFIT

- Racial inequality and student loans.
- Location plays a big role (no quality schools nearby)
- Tuition increases since 1980

Systemic factors that exacerbate debt:

- Prerequisites
- Travel to go to schools not local because of lack of options
- Lack of support and experience to do well in school
- Myth of affirmative action preventing white students from getting in to schools

Effective Strategies

- Helping connect borrowers with organizations that assist with refinancing and repayment
- Non-traditional methods (paying of loan companies in different ways)
- Mutual aid (helping create mutual aid fund, funded by CPUSA)
- Debt Strike? Organization
- All debt should be forgiven
- Mass movement to withhold all payments
- In Venezuela, students organized “Communists for Student Rights”
- Sustainable law economy center, collective, geared toward teaching people how to prepare for law degree.
- Financial literacy classes for young people before going to college
- CPUSA can educate on for-profit colleges (The Specter episode)
- Campaigning around student loan forgiveness
- Elect candidates who are for forgiving student debt
- “Second Bill of Rights” was to include right to an education
- Educate people that the lack of free higher education harms the economy.