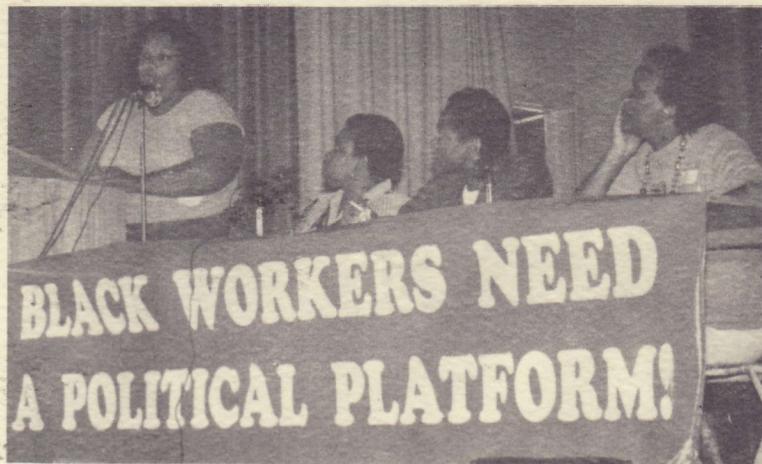


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African American Nation

A Journal for Self-Determination and Workers Power



Struggles for National Liberation: From South Africa to the US



- Historic South African Women's Charter
- Developing an African American National Liberation Front
- Labor Party Advocates
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Report on Labor Party Advocates Meeting to the Workers Unity Network

by Saladin Muhammad

The October 9th Chicago meeting of the Labor Party Advocates (LPA) was an important step forward in advancing a movement for independent working-class political action. It was held as an Interim Steering Committee meeting. It was attended by 81 union activists from 28 states. They included elected local and international officers and organizing staff. The OCAW and UE were the only two unions represented by their national officers, and who have officially endorsed the call for a labor party at their union national conventions. The OCAW has committed the most resources for the building of the LPA and the LPA's efforts to establish a base for the founding a labor party.

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Tony Mazzocci, a long time member of the OCAW and the main initiator of the LPA, opened the meeting by explaining its purpose and its limitations in terms of its power to make formal decisions. In response to the sentiment by

several people that the meeting needed to make some definite decisions about the future direction and decision making process of LPA, Mazzocci stressed that the meeting would not make formal decisions. He characterized the meeting as an opportunity to get the input of LPA activists from around the country and their assessments of where LPA should go from here. People conceded to Mazzocci's position, it seems, mainly because they felt that a discussion about LPA's direction was more important at this point than the question of decision making.

There had been an increasing feeling among LPA members prior to the meeting, that LPA was waning because of the lack of a program of action for building a labor party. This point was stressed by several participants when reporting on LPA activities in their locations and unions. It was felt that the lack of a program of action was partly due to the lack of a more collective national leadership in the LPA. The meeting established a clearer direction for LPA, but no actual change occurred in the decision making process. Some committees were formed to begin planning for an LPA national convention to found a labor party. The committees will involve participants at the Interim Steering Committee meeting and may serve to expand the areas of LPA national decision-making. The functioning of these committees will be key in determining if the LPA process is actually moving forward or if it will continue to wane.

The main discussion of the meeting centered around the question of the founding of a labor party. It was agreed that

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a national convention would be held in 1995 to establish a labor party. The base to be targeted for the founding of a party is the trade unions. In fact, it was proposed by many that unions should be the exclusive base for the founding of a labor party and that union representatives should be the only delegates invited to a founding party convention.

The dissatisfaction by a growing section of the trade union movement with the anti-labor policies of the Democratic Party and the "broken" promises to labor by the Clinton administration seemed to create a consensus among the participants that the trade union movement was now ready to found a labor party and that no other sectors of the population was ready or in a position to break with the Democratic Party at this point.

One of the errors in LPA's party building perspective is its emphasis on containing the movement for a labor party within the sole parameters of the LPA. Instead it should view LPA as a catalyst with an expanding base within the trade



unions leading to a broader (than LPA) labor party movement. We understand that this emphasis partly aims at "protecting" the labor party movement from being monopolized by small "ultra-left" groups. But there does not appear to be any precautions aimed at preventing the process from being monopolized by the AFL-CIO union bureaucracy. Both of these objectives should be supported by the Workers Unity Network (WUN). But the WUN view should emphasize that the unions must be an anchor and primary base for the building of a workers party, because of their major resources and existing organization within the economy.

The opening and main opposition to the union "exclusive" position came from participants who were members of the WUN. The WUN initiated struggle also opened up the

issue of the importance of major participation by oppressed nationalities and the need for outreach to the South in the labor party building movement. The racial composition and geographical representation at the meeting reflected weaknesses in meeting these two needs. There were 10 Blacks and one Latina in attendance and only one person from the South. There were also a small percentage of women at the meeting.

The LPA consensus about the readiness of a large section within the unions for a labor party, has been disconnected from the actual movements and struggles currently expressing the independent working-class political action and sentiment developing among the masses. For example, with the retreat by many unions from the demand for single payer universal healthcare, LPA could and should be an identifiable force leading a movement within the unions to press forward around this demand. This would help to link the LPA campaign to form a labor party around the actual sentiment of a large section within the unions and to millions of working people outside of unions, who are seeking alternatives to the current

corporate driven policies of the Democratic Party. The LPA could also be an important force pushing for the unions to do more organizing in the South. This would help to establish LPA as a clear ally of the developing workers movement in the South.

But it seems that LPA is deciding on the readiness of a large section of the unions to found a labor party mainly on the basis of its surveys distributed to the various unions polling members about their willingness to support a labor party, the activities of LPA Chapters in various cities and by the unstated number of people joining LPA as dues paying members. These efforts are important and should not be belittled. However, they don't take the movement to build a labor party deep enough into the spontaneous mass movements to be able to present it as a real political alternative.

The decision to hold a national convention to found a labor party, even with LPA's current weaknesses, should be viewed by the WUN as being consistent with our program.

Whether the 1995 convention will found a labor party or not should not be the decisive issue in determining if WUN should help to build for the convention. In fact, the failure to form a labor party at the 1995 convention would not in itself necessarily be seen as a betrayal of the movement for independent working-class political action, which the WUN perspective views as the social basis for forging a real workers party.

The participation by WUN members in the work for the convention should be in areas which best influence the process in the direction of mass action oriented activities. This includes working on key national convention planning committees. But WUN emphasis should be among the masses in and outside of the unions, finding ways of linking their struggles to the movement for a labor party. It should also help to organize local activities which directly involve local union

members and representatives of nonunion, mass working-class organizations in activities that more directly connects them to the labor party building and convention delegate process.

The WUN must help to expand and promote the campaigns and movement to organize labor in the South within the trade unions and the LPA as key to strengthening the US labor movement and for building a workers party. This includes promoting and directly helping to build election campaigns and organizations for independent working-class candidates. WUN members in the South should maintain their emphasis on organizing at the base of these movements and in helping to associate these struggles as being in alliance with the movement for a labor party.

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Editor's Note (cont.)

Muhammad's report on the Labor Party Advocates meeting points out the importance working-class political independence in challenging US imperialism and the need for a program of action.

African American Nation appreciates all the feedback and support it received from the first issue. Constructive criticism included recommendations for shorter articles and for more graphics. We have tried to incorporate good ideas as we received them. We also received views from many brothers and sisters and comrades that the development of the AAN as a tool for building the movement is very important. The following are some of the comments we received:

Keep up the great work !! - The South

Thank you for the hard work, determination and commitment that are reflected in this journal and in its continued development.
- Northeast

The most important contribution to the development of the third American Revolution I have seen in decades. - Midwest