

THIRD NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EXCHANGE OF PERSONS

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Report of Workshop #I - 7: LABOR

Chairman:

Michael Ross
Director, Department of International Affairs, AFL-CIO

Rapporteur:

Miss Marjorie Bailey
Assistant Director of Education, International Association of Machinists

Existing programs in labor exchange involve foreign trade unionists who come under trade union auspices, under government auspices, and through private groups such as the English-Speaking Union. By far the largest number of foreign visitors come under government grants. Opportunities for American trade unionists to go abroad come mainly through meetings of international trade union groups, the Fulbright program, and a few government grants.

The labor workshop opened with a discussion of what we hope to accomplish by exchanges and a recognition of the special problems of labor exchange. It was agreed that exchange will not solve all foreign relations problems, but at the same time it has already made a contribution and is of great importance to the U.S. labor movement.

Among the special problems raised was the labor people who come from Iron Curtain countries and such dictatorships as Spain. The U.S. labor movement will not participate in official exchanges with the unions of those countries, because the people who are allowed to come are not real trade unionists and such exchanges could be played up as a kind of endorsement of the government involved particularly in the "uncommitted" areas of the world.

We have now had roughly ten years of experience with exchange and it is a good time to re-examine our goals and our programs for the foreign labor visitors who come here. Moreover, in the future, there are going to be more and more people coming from under-developed areas. With their different cultural backgrounds and different needs, they will require different programming.

Among the suggestions made regarding the foreign unionists who come here were these:

1. Some people come to receive a kind of technical assistance on specific problems in the union organization or in collective bargaining, grievance procedures, etc. Careful planning is needed to make sure they go back with something definite. Better preparation and better selection overseas would also help in some cases.
2. Recruitment, program planning, and follow-up go together. The union, which is the counterpart in this country, should be drawn in, as well as the union overseas.

3. Foreign labor visitors would benefit by going to smaller towns. To do this well, the labor people in the town should be given a simple brochure with suggestions about what the visitor may want to do. They should be briefed about the visitor and his country, and he should be briefed about the town.
4. The value of foreign visitors in informing our membership about world affairs and foreign unions should be taken advantage of.
5. To prepare for and work out a useful program for people from the under-developed areas, it will be well to get together the trade union people who are responsible for helping and seeing these visitors. A meeting among people, from the unions, the private groups and government, could discuss what they think about the needs of this group and help orient us.
6. With some countries government sponsorship of these programs makes it difficult for the most suitable trade unionist who wants to come. More programs sponsored by the labor movement or conducted in cooperation with private agencies are desirable.
7. The team type of operation has disadvantages, particularly when the people come from different industries and there are not enough interpreters. More effort should be given to trying to solve the language problem.
8. The personal touch is vital. More foreign visitors should get into workers' homes.
9. Where community hospitality groups have a problem contacting the labor movement, they would find it useful to work through AFL-CIO local Community Services Committees and Education Committees.

The workshop next turned its attention to the need for more opportunities for U.S. unionists to go abroad. Such exchanges are now very-limited, compared to the numbers who come here, but American unionists also need to learn more about the problems overseas.

1. We need more information and publicity about present programs such as the Fulbright scholarships, the American-Scandinavian Foundation, and the English-Speaking Union. The labor movement needs to put more effort into publicizing these programs and encouraging people to go.
2. New or weak unions in some nations might welcome American unions to provide some technical assistance on collective bargaining or administrative problems. The labor movement is best equipped to do this and to sponsor it, but in some cases government sponsorship might be useful. The invitations for such help would have to come from the foreign unions.
3. More programs, such as workers' travel programs, would be useful.

Two main points were made during the workshop about the general set-up of all labor exchange programs, both those for people coming here and those for American trade unionists going abroad.

1. There should be more coordination between all the groups working in this field--AFL-CIO, individual unions, government groups, and the private agencies. More meetings of the people involved would be valuable.
2. Many of the suggestions for improvement take money. More appropriations and more financial support are necessary.