

“How can you tell whether or not someone will be interested in our paper, *Red Flag*?”

That’s what we discussed in the first of two study groups about dialectical materialism. We started the meeting reporting on our experiences in several transit divisions as well as on the streets of a town near a military base. This group had distributed about 600 *Red Flags* at transit divisions during the first week of the project, and another 60 to Marines.

“If they’re dressed conservatively, I would think they wouldn’t want it, but if they’re dressed like me (less conservatively and with an anarchist patch on his shirt) I would think they would be more receptive,” said a young man. “But I haven’t tried it.”

“If I see them turn down two other people, I won’t try myself,” said a fifteen-year-old high school student participating in his second summer project. “But sometimes people surprise you.”

“That’s for sure,” said a veteran comrade. “I went up to a very buttoned-down looking bus driver, and was surprised to find that he was very interested in our ideas. He said he hated the union leadership because they were just like the bosses and was very grateful for our paper.”

“If somebody rejects two other comrades,” said a young man who joined ICWP at May Day, “you should still try to talk to them. Maybe you will have a different approach, and be able to point out something that your other comrades didn’t.”

All these comments led to a very interesting discussion about dialectical materialism, the communist philosophy that helps us understand the world and change it. We discussed the difference between idealism and materialism. We first clarified that we’re not using the terms in the traditional sense: idealism meaning you have high moral standards and ideals and materialism meaning you’re all about the money. For communists, idealism means having ideas that are not backed up by material reality, and materialism means understanding the world by scientific inquiry—investigation being the first step.

So we had been doing a lot of investigating in the summer project about how people respond to communist ideas. From these experiences, we found out that you can’t judge people by appearances. You also can’t accept all the racist, sexist and anti-working class stereotypes you get from TV, church, school, etc. You have to go out and talk to workers, presenting a communist analysis of the world situation. Then you see how they respond, and how much workers have in common.

We ended the discussion by asking, “How do we know we can mobilize the masses for communism?” The answers to this question clearly pointed out the difference between idealism and materialism. One person said, “We’ll win because we have guts!” Others said, “We’ll win because workers need these ideas, and we have seen from our experience that when we take *Red Flag* to them, they take them as their own.” We concluded that it’s not just about guts, or optimism, or dedication. It’s about doing the day-to-day work of putting forward communist ideas to workers, whose own lives prove them to be true.

The main idealism we have to combat is the idealism which holds us back from seeing the urgency and taking the opportunity to mobilize the masses

for communism

--Struggling for a Materialist Outlook