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# More Flexibility in Organizational Forms

By F. Brown

THE problem that we want to discuss now is not a new one.

It is the problem of improving the life and activities of the Party units and fractions. Plenum after Plenum of the Central Committee as well as of the District Committee have already indicated the measures through which such fundamental problems should be solved. However, while in some respects we can register an improvement (in having begun to transfer the center of gravity of our organizational work from the neighborhoods to the inside of the shops by building new shop nuclei, etc.) in other respects the problem has not yet been tackled fundamentally. That is to say, we have not solved the question of the proper functioning of the street units, fractions, etc.

In the last period, especially because of the many new developments in trade union work, in the field of unemployed work, in the task of broadening the united front, etc., the

comrades in some districts are raising the problem of how best to improve the activities of the units and at the same time find better and proper organizational forms that would enable the Party to get the best political and organizational results in accordance with the new developments and tasks confronting the Party today.

All kinds of ideas are developed around this question. There are comrades who think that the actual organizational structure should remain intact, that it fits all purposes, that no changes can be made and are not even necessary. There are other comrades who are alarmed by the actual status and in their eagerness to get quick results are ready to build "industrial units," and to completely negate the importance of the street units, believing that industrial units are the correct new organizational form that will solve all problems. Both of these points of view are wrong. We will be enabled to find the correct solution if we examine the facts briefly.

The change brought about by the situation in regard to trade union work, in the field of unemployed work, of broadening the united front, of giving real help in the building of union organization, etc., has brought us at the last few plenums, to emphasize the importance of the solution of such organizational problems as the one we are discussing. All the decisions made in regard to the transferring of the center of gravity of our organizational structure from the neighborhoods to the inside of the factories, to the strengthening and building of the shop nuclei, to the building of fractions, etc., followed by the decisions of organizing the proper forces to speed this process, are absolutely correct, and must remain in force, since the building of shop nuclei, and the strengthening of the Party in the industries and unions remains the basic organizational task of the Party. Yet the latest developments in our trade union work, and the perspective of broadening the united front in bringing about a workers' and farmers' party, etc., shows that we must solve the problem of a more flexible distribution of forces and concentration of activities which here and there, on the basis of concrete cases and situation, will call for more flexible transitional organizational forms.

What are the facts? Investigation of the life of the street units in the latest period has shown that street units are not connected with the neighborhood organizations of the workers, are not correctly orientated towards deeper penetration of the masses in the neighborhoods with the purpose of influencing and organizing them, but are mostly confined to inner activities around hundreds of problems;

activities that are referred to committee meetings, subcommittee meetings, etc., which take all our members' time.

A thorough analysis of this peculiar situation has shown clearly that the poor life, (especially of the street units) is not only due to the composition of the units, but mainly because our Party in some instances, in practice, takes on the character of an auxiliary of the mass organization. In many cases it has also been shown that most of the points on the agenda of the units have nothing to do with the main tasks of the street units, which include winning over and guiding the struggles in the territory where the units are located. Besides this, we found that most of the points on the agenda are followed by collections for various purposes and campaigns, so much so that the units not only do not concentrate on the territory where they are located, but are unable to raise the necessary means for the furthering of their own propaganda, in view of the fact that most of the energies (as stated above) go in other directions.

The solution primarily in solving the problem of the activities, and in this relation the inner life and composition of the street units, which still embrace the large majority of the membership. Let us look again at the street unit for a moment.

We have street units composed mainly of unemployed workers, housewives and other elements, and only a few employed workers, very often concentrating in territories where very often as for example in New York, the Party members do not live. We see immediately that such units cannot really rally the masses effectively in a particular territory around immediate issues, that they cannot penetrate the various mass organizations in the territory, clubs of all kinds and other fraternal organizations existing in the various neighborhoods in practically all American cities.

As it is now, the street units are supposed to take up all kinds of problems aiming at influencing the masses in the territory, concentrating on some factory in the neighborhood, conducting unemployed work, labor defense work, etc. Besides this, the units are supposed to give guidance and check on the activities of all their members, many of whom are members of unions and other organizations, which to make things more complicated are located in other parts of the city. Clearly, these units have a herculean task, duties and tasks in all directions which bring the units to a standstill, to an inner-circle life. We find especially that new elements who join the units feel that the Party demands too much of them. The Party not only overburdens

them with activities, but becomes too expensive. Besides, because many of the activities of the unit members participating in trade union and mass organization work are not seen by the rest of the comrades, the assignment of neighborhood work is thrown upon the shoulders of only a few other comrades, as a result of which misunderstanding and friction arise that do not contribute to the improvement of the work of the unit and of its social life. Evidently, such a situation leaves no room for educational activity, which in spite of the good intentions of the unit bureaus, is very poor, which is also the reason for the discouragement, especially of the new members, in many units.

Is there a way to solve this burning question? Yes, the solution has been worked out long ago: the problem before us is to stop discovering what has been discovered, and search for new solutions; but boldly put old decisions into life and improve the organizational form and method of work according to the demands of the situation.

The main organizational task stands as follows: transfer the center of our activities to the factories and trade unions by simultaneously strengthening our work in the neighborhoods. Translated into organizational forms, this means building, strengthening and improving the political life of the shop nuclei, building fractions, and orientating them correctly to their objectives, and improving the activities of the neighborhood units by better orientation to their tasks, which calls for an improvement in their organization.

Examples in New York and other districts have shown that groups of comrades under the continuous guidance of the District Committee were able to build in a short time real mass organizations without the mobilization of the sections and units. On the other hand, the facts show that where the units of the Party are busy in building everything, are just "active" with inner discussion only, they neglect their main tasks, and get very poor results in the various phases of work. This indicates immediately that one of the solutions of the problem of the units is to stop considering the Party an auxiliary for weak mass organizations around the Party, weak because of their basic sectarianism, because of the old inner organizational orientation of our Party, and because of the conception that the Party carries on the main work of these organizations anyway.

In districts like New York, Chicago, and Cleveland, for example, it should not be difficult to select strong groups of comrades whose main Party task will be to help build the International Labor Defense and the American League Against War and Fascism into real mass organizations, a group that

must be trained to understand that such organizations must be built on the basis of their own program, that they will be guided by the higher committees of the Party without being entangled with directives from all sources that usually paralyze the activities of these organizations. This does not mean that we want to build these organizations through Party forces only. On the contrary, the task of these groups will be to involve all kinds of elements that agree with the program of the mass organizations that we want to build. Only in this way will we break also with the old sectarianism of the mass organizations that organizationally are copies of our Party structure. The small branches of 10 and 15 members of the I.L.D., for example, will disappear, and in a very short time we will have a strong I.L.D. of the Bronx, or of Brooklyn, in New York, or of the Southside of Chicago, or the Westside of Cleveland, or East Liberty in Pittsburgh, etc.

#### **Mechanical Reorganization Is No Solution**

This is only part of the solution to the problem. There still remains to be solved the problem of composition. This is the heart of the problem and the most difficult to solve. Hence, we must be on guard against tackling it too mechanically, a situation which we see in some of the Districts.

It would be a very simple solution to take out of the street units all of the employed workers and place them into the so-called "industrial" units based on the trade union locals, which would correspond, practically, at the best, to what the fractions should be. To take out the unemployed comrades and build around them units in the unemployed field, or units on W.P.A. projects would be a mechanical approach that would bring us to the point of reducing the composition of the street units to housewives, professionals and a few unorganized workers. It would take out of the street units all employed workers and the trade union members—the best elements.

Such mechanical reorganization would not only lower the political life and activities of the street units, but would separate the most active members from the political life of the Party: more, it would lower at once the agitation and propaganda through which we reach masses that not always can be reached in factories and trade unions through our Party organization there. It is known that at this stage the political life of the fractions is still low. It can be argued that our immediate task should be to bring more political life into the proposed "industrial" units. This is precisely what the Party is determined to do, but it is a process that cannot be accomplished over night. It would take time to make these "industrial" units instruments of the Party not only in their

particular union, but also for the broader agitation and propaganda in the neighborhoods, a task that would be complicated by the location where the Party members live, the locals meet, etc. It is not the "industrial" unit, embracing all the Party members of a union that would identify itself with a particular factory, that can solve all our problems. It is the fraction that must be built: and it is here that we must be on guard against a mechanical approach, that we must be flexible by organizing into fractions the active members in the union and cutting down the duplication of the same assignments in units and fractions.

In regard to Party members working in shops where there are already other Party members, the problem is simple and there should be no discussion. These comrades are to be attached to shop nuclei. In regard to other Party members who are **key men** in their unions, as already stated, we must see to it that their main Party task shall be transferred into the unions. These Party members, however, shall remain on the rolls of the units and pay their dues there. At the same time their units must understand that these comrades cannot be involved to the same extent as the other members of the unit, in territorial work. In specific cases, where by bringing together comrades working in a given industry, we are able not only to improve the activities of the Party members in the unions, but at the same time also have the possibility of building shop nuclei, by concentrating with all these forces in 2 or 3 shops these Party members shall be brought together in a unit, as for example the case of the building industrial units in New York (where in one building there are few shops and thousands of workers).

On a borough scale, or some other territorial division of the city, selected unemployed comrades of various units can be brought together into a section for the purpose of building the unemployed movement, so that their main Party task (as in the case of active members in trade unions) will become unemployed work. The same in regard to comrades on W.P.A. projects, etc.

With such an orientation we will be able to strengthen all the phases of our Party work, and prevent placing the entire burden of the territorial work of the street units on the shoulders of comrades not involved in any other work.

At the same time we must take the necessary steps to overcome the weakness that will result in the street units by taking out of active participation those members active in other phases of work. How can this be done? (This is mainly the problem of the larger cities. In another article we will take up the problem of the smaller cities and towns.) By

breaking down the old idea of small street units of 8 or 10 or 12 members who because of this have weak leadership, and by bringing about units that shall grow to 30 or 40. These units need not meet in private places, but can meet in any of the many halls that can be found in practically every neighborhood in the larger cities. In this way it will be much easier to select the best elements for leading positions. It will improve the educational activities and the political life of the units, and in turn strengthen the activities of the units as a whole, and also help retain the new members in the Party. Furthermore, the new Party members by entering into a bigger family will have an improved social life, which will increase the activities and initiative of individual members.

This orientation brings us now to another point. That is, on what basis shall the territorial units be built—on a street basis or on a larger scale. As it is now, in some cities not only are the units very small, but in many instances they cover, as for example in New York, the territory of one or two Assembly Districts, or two half wards of an Assembly District, so that these territorial units cannot properly approach the political problems of a certain territory. A larger unit, however, of 30-40 Party members which will correspond to the Party, for example, in Assembly District X will be much more able to better orientate itself to the political problems of the territory.

In the last few years the Party orientation has been to build the districts on a state basis and have the districts identify themselves with the state organization of the Party. If this is correct for the district, it must also be applied to the sections and territorial units. Today, for example, the Party in New York has over 10,000 members and is facing hundreds of problems on a city wide scale, on a borough scale, etc. Guidance for the activity of the Party organization must be given every day from the District. This not only complicates the work of the district leadership, but also complicates the work of the various sections, especially where they cover the territory of two or three Assembly Districts, or split Assembly Districts, etc. The problems of Brooklyn as a whole are frequently common to all the sections in Brooklyn, but they now have to be solved by the District Committee. Why not have a leading body that will guide the activities of the borough of Brooklyn as a whole, and similar Party committees for the other boroughs?

At this point the question will be raised, what is the difference between this organizational structure, and the electoral structure of the Socialist Party? The fundamental difference remains; namely, that the main weight of our Party

organization must lie in the factories, in the unions and in the mass organizations. This does not conflict with the idea that all Party organizations of a certain territory that identify themselves with the existing political divisions shall be led by the leading committees as stated above. It does mean, for example, that in the case of a specific campaign that the Party has to conduct in Brooklyn or the Bronx, every unit, every section, every shop nucleus, every fraction will have to be mobilized in this campaign by the proper leading committee of the Party in this borough, and of course the Section Committees, or Sub-Section Committees, there.

By bringing about such changes, by being more flexible in our organizational forms from the District down to the units, not only will we connect ourselves much more strongly with the masses on a territorial basis, but we will be better prepared to improve our work in the trade unions, we will be more mobile in building the united front, and prepare ourselves to be a real driving force in the building of a Workers and Farmers Party. It is understood that these changes, no matter how slight they are, cannot be brought about over night. They must be well planned, taking into consideration the concrete conditions and cases. We can notice in the last period, that where the districts tried to bring about changes too quickly, and to some extent mechanically, we already see a lowering in the dues payments, a lowering in our agitation and propaganda, for the reasons already stated.

While adapting ourselves better to the new situation, for the purpose of getting the best results, we must keep in mind that one of our main tasks is to improve especially the educational activities of the Party. It is by improving the educational activities that we will also improve the initiative and the social life in the lower organizations. By improving the organizational structure of the Party along the above lines we will be able not only to intensify our activity, connect the Party more strongly with the masses, but will bring about a better relationship among Party members, and give time to the Party members for their private life.

**Note:** This article is based not only on investigation of the life of our street units, on the basis of our tasks in the trade union movement, etc., but also on discussions that are taking place among leading comrades in charge of organizational work in various districts. It is written primarily for the purpose of getting the reaction of leading bodies (on the basis of their experiences) to this burning problem. On the basis of a thorough discussion, the Central Committee will formulate its organizational decisions through which we will be able to improve the activities of the entire Party.