

Organizational Problems in the Light of the Open Letter

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THE Open Letter of the Extraordinary Party Conference raises very sharply the problem of building the Party into a revolutionary party of the proletariat. It states that "in spite of the spread of the mass movements and, above all, in spite of the radicalization of the masses of workers, the Party has not developed into a revolutionary mass party of the proletariat." While the political influence of the Party is steadily increasing, and a considerable number of workers are joining the Party, the actual growth continues at an extremely slow pace. Thousands of non-Party workers have participated in the leadership of strikes and in the struggles of the unemployed, and are carrying on active work in the unions, mass organizations and united front committees. Large numbers of these workers are ripe for the Party, standing on the very threshold, and, with little effort, can be drawn in. And since our Party is not fully conscious, during the day-to-day struggles of the necessity of recruiting these already revolutionized workers, numbers of them seeking an outlet for their political activity, are drawn into the Socialist Party. In those sections where the Communist Party is very weak and does not sufficiently expose the Socialist Party, that party is still in a position to carry out its historic role. Upon the mass activity and recruiting of the Communist Party depends to what extent the Socialist Party will play its part in stemming the tide of the revolutionary upsurge.

The influx of new elements into our Party during the past few years emphasizes the powerful attraction of the Party to the large masses of toilers. More than 35,000 workers joined the Party in the last three years. During the past six months, our Party recruited 8,300 members. These workers joined as a result of the general activity of the Party, rather than through any special effort on the part of the Party membership. In proof of the above facts let us compare the figures of the last recruiting campaign (1932) with the recruiting during the first six months of this year.

During the 1932 three-month recruiting campaign, 6,300 workers were admitted to the Party, with a monthly average of 2,700 in the last two months of that period.

In the past six months of this year, the Party has had no special campaign. Although it has led many successful strikes and struggles, the recruiting has reached only half the monthly average as compared with the 1932 campaign. Our Party has not yet fully attained the realization that the daily recruiting of the best elements in struggles and activities is of vital importance.

As a crass example we can cite the Furriers Union. Under the leadership of the Party, after a victorious struggle, the Furriers Union has established itself as the only union in the industry, wiping out the reformist union and organizing 10,000 workers into its ranks. Yet, today, after more than one year's existence, the Party fraction numbers only 100!

The ability to recruit at such time when the attention of the membership is directed toward mass recruiting as a campaign, clearly illustrates the mass attraction of our Party and the large reserves surrounding the Party from which we can draw. Tens of thousands of workers, many close sympathizers, are organized in the revolutionary unions, A. F. of L. and other mass organizations. Over 150,000 workers read the Party press and are influenced by the Party agitation. A large percentage of these workers are potential Party members. The fractions in these mass organizations are not conscious of this vast reserve from which the Party membership can be greatly increased.

In going over the figures of new recruits of 1933, it is seen that only a very insignificant number were recruited from those workers involved in strikes and struggles (Detroit auto strike, Pennsylvania miners' strike, shoe and textile, metal strikes, etc.), with the bulk of the workers coming from the ranks of the unemployed.

In the Detroit strike, led by the revolutionary union, we did not pay sufficient attention to recruiting into the Party and to building and strengthening the factory nuclei. In the April strikes in Pittsburgh District, only a negligible number were drawn into the Party.

The same holds true in most of the struggles during this period, with the exception of the St. Louis nut-pickers' strike, where, through the conscious effort of the section leadership of the Party, they succeeded in building a Party nucleus in almost every department of the factories, as well as in building the Y.C.L. The Party in St. Louis, in contrast to the other districts, knew how to bring forward boldly and emphasize the role of the Party in the course of the strike. The union organizer, a well-known Communist

who never hid the fact that he was a Communist, continuously kept his eyes open for possible Party members.

Not underestimating the necessity of recruiting at all times and through all activities, the main attention of the Party must be riveted upon recruiting from decisive basic industries.

At the Fourteenth Plenum the Party set itself, among others, the following tasks: The organization of a firm basis for our Party among the decisive strata of American workers in the most important industrial centers. The Party pledged at this plenum to "overcome the isolation of the Party from the decisive masses of the American workers, to come before the masses as their vanguard in the struggle against the offensive of the bourgeoisie and against the imperialist war and to firmly root itself in the decisive industry by means of solid personal contact with the workers."

The above examples show that the Party did not fully understand this central task. The existing shop nuclei in the basic industry did not grow. Ninety percent of those who joined the Party were unemployed, and a very small percentage of the employed workers came through direct activity in and around the factory. An analysis of the membership composition shows that only 3 percent are steel workers, a little above 5 percent miners, not quite 3 percent automobile workers, only 1 percent marine workers, 1.3 percent railroad workers, .3 percent chemical workers.

Only 28 percent of the employed members, or 7 percent of the total membership of the Party, are working in mines or factories employing 500 or more workers.

The Open Letter very sharply states:

"It is idle chatter to talk about the revolutionizing of the working class by the Party unless the Party conquers a firm base for itself among the miners, metal, steel workers, auto, marine and textile workers. . . it is nothing but phrase-mongering to talk about the building of the Party and the revolutionary trade unions without doing this among the important bodies of workers, in the big factories, in the important industrial sections."

At the Extraordinary Party Conference, the task was set to root the Party in the decisive elements of the working class in the basic industries. Emphasis was again placed on the necessity of concentration and the Conference concretely laid down the plan for the next period. The five concentration districts, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and New York, were assigned the special task of concentrating on altogether about 50 factories in the steel, mining, marine and automobile industries, besides those specific industries and problems which the districts have (stockyard,

Negro territory, etc.). In these selected plants and sections, the task of the Party is to mobilize the workers for the struggle on wages, improvement of conditions, unemployment insurance, etc., through the energetic, thorough work of agitation, propaganda and organization through the utilization of all available forces and weapons for concentration and struggle. A definite break with the past methods of allowing ourselves to be driven by the course of events is the prerequisite for the assured carrying out of concentration.

"It goes without saying that it is our task to place ourselves at the head of every movement which breaks out spontaneously in the country, and to lead such movements, or where the reformist leaders stand at the head of a movement, to work for the building of fighting organs of the masses independent of the bureaucrats, in order to aid the masses in the exposure and replacement of the reformist leaders.

"But unless we tenaciously concentrate our work on the most important industrial centers, we cannot build up a stable Party and revolutionary trade union movement, capable of resisting all blows and persecutions by the bourgeoisie."—Open Letter (Our emphasis.)

The primary task of the whole Party is the building of a strong proletarian base in the big enterprises in these main industrial centers of the country. In order to carry out this primary task, all members of the Party, every leading committee, unit, section, district, and the center, must criticize in the most analytical manner its past activity and approach toward this vital problem. In the process of the preparation for the fulfillment of this basic task, many difficulties will be raised as a justification for our failure to build the Party and revolutionary unions in the large factories. We have to fight all these expressions which hinder our concentration work. The utmost care in the selection of forces, thorough discussion of the situations in the factories and methods of approach to the workers; the most detailed, daily attention and guidance from the higher committees, coordination between union fractions, Party committees and shop nuclei, the fullest utilization of the *Daily Worker* and the language papers, the mobilization of mass organizations, are essentials for the penetration of the selected factories. In connection with the selection of the leadership for the concentration points, the Open Letter states:

"Every Party member and especially every Party functionary must be a real organizer of mass struggles in his particular sphere of work. From this standpoint, the Party must judge the activity of its functionaries and must choose its leading bodies."

The Extraordinary Party Conference set the following control tasks:

1. To establish active Party units, drawing in the most advanced workers through personal work with them.
2. To build real mass trade union groups with functioning Party fractions in the sections.
3. To issue popular factory papers, or, for the beginning, factory bulletins.
4. To develop united front action, win the social-reformist workers and expose and fight reformism and social-fascist leaders.
5. To develop strong corps of proletarian cadres, experienced in mass work, and establish collective leadership of sections and tried secretaries in units, establish around the lower committees of the Party broad, active cadres which must be constantly instructed and utilized for the effective mobilization of the Party membership and for mass work; to draw active workers, members of the Party, from the factories into the leadership of the section committees.

The fact that in only a few of the concentration points have we shop nuclei, and where shop nuclei do exist they do not function because of lack of guidance from the higher committees, and in many of the selected concentration points we have only contacts and no organization, brings very sharply to the forefront the necessity of recruiting directly from these factories, and building the shop nuclei, the firm base for all our activities in the shop. The Party has some sad experiences in neglecting the building of the Party in the factories. In the Detroit automobile strike, in one factory where we succeeded in organizing the workers into the union and where we led the workers to victory in the strike, the union lost ground due to the absence of Party organization.

The building of the shop nuclei should proceed very systematically. In the discussion of the Open Letter and in the plan of work, recruiting should be concretized.

Despite all talk of the necessity of organization of Party members on the basis of the factory, we still find Communists who work together in one factory belonging to a street unit. A thorough examination of the membership will help organize these members into shop nuclei. Without further hesitation, we should establish shop nuclei even in those factories where we have only two or three comrades. Recruiting of the best elements from existing shop groups; utilization of subscription lists of the various Party papers and examination of the membership of mass organizations, will help set up shop nuclei in factories where we have no Party organization yet.

Strikes and struggles for economic and political needs, carried out on the basis of the united front, will tear down the artificial barriers existing between the revolutionary workers and the broad masses of other workers. Participation in the daily struggles of the workers, winning in this manner their confidence and extending the influence of the Party, and systematic attention both from the outside forces and the comrades in the factory to recruiting, will result in the building up of a solid organization of the Party in the factory. Such an organization, basing itself as it does on organization of struggle, must of necessity grow into a decisive body in the factory.

The tremendous fluctuation in the Party which in some concentration districts exceeded in the last period the 100 percent mark, took place mainly in the street nuclei. In the shop nuclei, even in those instances where we did not succeed in carrying on effective struggles, we did not lose members, but at the worst, remained stagnant, proving that organization at the point of production is more stable than on territorial basis. In the Chicago district, in spite of the unsatisfactory factory work in the past, the membership in the shop nuclei grew steadily while at the same time there was an 80 per cent fluctuation of the membership although militant mass unemployed struggles were carried through. Close contact and relationship between the members of the nuclei; between nuclei and non-Party workers in the factory, as well as a clearer understanding of the problems due to the common interests and a naturally careful selection of the best elements for the Party, stabilize the membership of the nuclei, reducing the fluctuation to a minimum. In the territorial units the membership is heterogeneous, not recruited from the daily struggles and activities in the territory, but gotten through general agitation and in most cases without the consultation of the unit membership. In addition to these major reasons, the very poor, politically weak, life of the street unit is a cause of the alarming fluctuation.

To secure greater stability and raise the political level of the membership and develop new leading forces, it is necessary to establish evening schools and study groups for the members of the Party in the concentration points.

We can not over-emphasize the political importance of drawing in larger numbers of American-born workers from the basic industries and developing from them leading cadres for the Party. In connection with this, special attention should be paid to the recruiting of Negro workers.

Every Party member, every leading committee, imbued with the

central task of building the Party into a mass Party of the American proletariat, must exert all energies toward the carrying out of this task. The Open Letter states:

“...a Communist Party, with a very weak and inadequately functioning organization in the big factories and among the decisive sections of the American industrial workers, a Communist Party whose entire policy, whose entire agitation and propaganda, whose entire daily work, is not concentrated on winning over and mobilizing these workers and winning of the factories, a Communist Party which, through its revolutionary trade union work, does not build highways to the broadest masses of workers, cannot lay claim to a policy capable of making it the leader of the working class within the shortest possible time.”
