

Shall We Split Our Districts and Sections?

By J. PETER

“THE Thirteenth Plenum of the E.C.C.I. sets before all Communist Parties as most important tasks the carrying on of regular and constant check-up on the fulfillment of decisions, especially on mass work, the organizational strengthening of their ranks, of preparing to go underground, of tightening up discipline and fighting fitness of every Party organization and of every member of the Party.”

Let us examine a few organizational problems of our Party in the light of the above decision of the E.C.C.I.

The Open Letter states that “every Party member must now understand that it depends on correct policy and **above all, the execution of the correct policy** whether we will be able to mobilize the masses of workers for struggle and whether our Party in this historically favorable situation will

become the decisive mass Party of the American Proletariat."

The Party, since the Seventh Convention, after cleansing its ranks of the opportunist elements, had the correct policy on all basic questions. The Party adopted good resolutions, such as were adopted at the Fourteenth Plenum of the Central Committee and at the Extraordinary Party Conference. But these resolutions to a certain extent remained the property of the higher committees. There are yet many Section Committees and nuclei where these resolutions have not been thoroughly understood, and many more where these resolutions have not been executed.

Why does this situation exist? Because "the leadership of the Party . . . does not work out carefully with the comrades of the lower organizations ways and means for the carrying through of resolutions and checking up on their executions." —(Open Letter).

Has the leadership of the Party, since the Open Letter, tried to change the old method of work and to get closer to the lower organizations? Yes. There is a much better understanding of this question in the Party. However, there are still many weaknesses, especially in connection with the problem of concentration. We would have had better results in many Districts if we had not allowed ourselves "to be driven by events," if all available forces had been concentrated in the most strategic factories, mines, docks, mills, etc.; if the leading committees had given more guidance to the nuclei in these factories and to the concentration units there. However, there are certain good beginnings.

Large Territories Make Personal Leadership Difficult

What are the reasons for these weaknesses, in addition to an insufficient political understanding, in some cases, of the necessity for strengthening the lower organizations? We will deal in this article with only one of the reasons, and that is the physical possibilities, under the present circumstances, for giving leadership to the lower organizations. Let us assume that every Party committee really wants to "give the members practical assistance in carrying out their tasks and to check up on the carrying out of these tasks." The present organizational structure of our Party, with huge territories containing very important industrial centers, under a District or Section Committee, makes it quite difficult to give personal leadership to the organizations in these centers. A few examples will give more clarity to this problem.

Let us examine the four concentration districts. District 8 is concentrating on steel, packing house, coal mines and railroad. One of the biggest railroad centers in the U.S.A. is in St. Louis. This section is more than 250 miles from Chicago. The coalfields in Southern Illinois are about 200 miles away. The District has two states in its territory—

Illinois and Indiana—covering an area almost twice as big as England. District 6 is only a little smaller in area than England, and contains such important sections as Columbus, Cincinnati, and East Ohio, which can be given regular attention only with great difficulty and expense, because of the great distance involved. District 5 has in its territory the West Virginia coalfields where the miners are ready and anxious for our leadership, but because of the great distance the District Buro cannot pay sufficient attention to this very important mining field. The District Committee of District No. 11 has four states—North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana and Idaho to take care of—a territory which is as big as France and Germany together. The nearest town where we have Party organization is 120 miles away from the city where the District Headquarters is located. The furthest one is 1100 miles from the headquarters, a distance as great as from New York to St. Louis. District 19 has also four states in its territory: Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming, almost as great an area as Germany, France, Belgium and Switzerland combined. The important mining sections in Utah and New Mexico are from 700 to 800 miles from Denver where the District Headquarters is located. District 20, a new district, has jurisdiction over the states of Texas and Oklahoma, a territory which is bigger than France and Italy together and six and a half times bigger than England.

The Sections in these Districts are hundreds of miles away from the Headquarters city, requiring much time and money if the members of the District Buro are to visit them.

On a smaller scale, the same situation exists in the Sections, large territories, many important industries, many unions, mass organizations, and last but not least, a large number of nuclei to guide and direct. It is quite difficult in a Section, where at best we have only one comrade who gives his full time to Party work, to pay proper attention to all out of town units. Sometimes weeks and months pass before someone visits these important units. Even when the comrades in the Section Committee make all possible effort (which is not always the case, as for example in Youngstown) to visit these units, stay with the comrades for a while and help them in their work, they still face the problem of the number of available forces and of the lack of sufficient finances.

The Sections in the big cities, like New York and Chicago, do not have the problem of distance, but the other difficulties are there with one additional one, and that is the large number of units in the Section. In New York, for example, we have sections with 35-50 units, with a membership of between 600 and 800, and with 10-15 shop nuclei. In the Section Committees there are only three or four comrades who have time

and are able to give leadership to the units. The rest are leaders of unions, and other mass organizations, and even if each of them were to carry out their task and be responsible for a unit, only a small number of units (8 or 9) would have members of the Section Committee participating in their work.

We could bring forward the argument here that the best solution would be to concentrate on a few sections, on a few units, and let the rest get along as best they can. This is a good argument for continuing the present organizational structure of the Party, but we must also consider one other important problem and that is that even the most important concentration sections cannot be reached and adequately taken care of because of the great distances and the insufficient number of trained forces in the lower organizations. If we permit them to function without personal guidance, there is a danger that the lower organizations and strategic points will disintegrate as has been the case in the past. Besides this, we must consider another important problem, which the Party faces in this period, and that is the absolute necessity of being in personal contact with all organizations. What would happen if in the very near future the Party should have to work in an illegal situation? It would be impossible to send out circular letters to the lower organizations, or to give directives about a certain campaign. We will have to personally guide the lower organizations through members of the Section Committee, the District Committee, and Central Committee by means of an elaborate system of instructors from the higher committee to the lower organizations. All of these considerations argue for splitting the present huge territories of the districts and sections.

What Are the Advantages of Smaller Districts and Sections?

What problem should be considered in splitting the districts and sections?

1. Whether the party organizations will have the proper industrial basis;
2. Close proximity to the lower organizations, — this means, how can we, with the least difficulty, maintain personal contact with the lower organizations;
3. To parallel the electoral districts as far as possible, with state borders for districts; and congressional election districts for the sections;
4. Strengthening of Party organizations (number of units; number of members; mass organization units; influence of Party; **Daily Worker**; circulars, etc.)
5. Last, but not least, the available forces for leadership.

What will be the result of a proper splitting of the districts and sections?