

Problems of Registration

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REGISTRATION OF THE PARTY MEMBERSHIP is almost completed in every district. In this article we shall discuss a few problems which have come up:

1. What to do about those members who did not register.
2. How to use the registration as an instrument for recruiting.
3. How to use the facts gained by registering the membership.

The only district which provides material for this discussion is New York. The New York district registered only about 70 percent of the membership in the three weeks of the registration period.

The New York district, for obvious reasons, has the best apparatus handling the membership, and if the New York district, with quite adequate machinery for a thorough preparation, in three unit meetings registered only 70 percent of the members on record—we feel rather uneasy in waiting for results from the other districts.

Even if all districts succeeded in registering the same percentage as New York, we would have about 30 percent of our membership outside of the Party organization. It would do no harm to stress again one of our most burning organizational problems—fluctuation—and the cause and cure of it.

Thirty percent of those Party members in New York who had membership books, and paid dues in the Party, for a short

or long period, we have not succeeded in reaching during the registration. 30 percent of the membership didn't come to the unit meetings to get their new books. Almost one third of the membership (a) hasn't found out yet that there is a registration taking place in the Party—that they have to exchange their old books for new ones; or (b) haven't made up their minds whether to register or not; or (c) don't want to register for one reason or another.

According to the facts in New York, the shop and industrial units succeeded in registering about 90 percent of the membership. The small size neighborhood units registered almost 80 percent of their members. The large branches have only 50-55 percent registration. These facts very clearly indicate not only the problems we face concerning the fluctuation, but also contain the organizational solution to a great extent.

In the shop and industrial units the comrades know each other. If certain members of the unit don't attend the meetings, the unit as a whole is disturbed and takes steps to find the reason for this inactivity. In the small neighborhood unit, the unit bureau is able to check on the members for the simple reason that they know everybody, not only by name, but they know also their addresses and something about their problems. But in the large branches—branches which had, and in certain instances still have, 100 or more members, the unit bureau does not know a large proportion of the membership. They know only those members of the branch who attend the meetings more or less regularly. Those members who are active in mass organizations, or are not absorbed in Party activities, are not known to the leadership of the branch. The result in New York was that when the registration resulted in exchanging the membership books of about 50-55 percent of the members on record, and the district apparatus checked with the unit about the remaining members, the unit bureau was unable to give any explanation for the remaining 45-50 percent. They didn't have their addresses; they didn't know who they were or how to get in touch with them.

We would like to touch on the organizational problems—problems which if we succeed in solving them, would result in bringing back a large number of those members who today, because of the lack of attention and organizational apparatus, are drifting away or out of the Party. Steps which must be taken immediately during the period of registration are the following:

1. The registration period should be extended at least two or three weeks, in certain places even longer if the circumstances demand it.

2. The unit membership which has registered should be divided into groups of two or three, giving them the assignment of visiting every Party member on record. They will have the task of convincing these comrades to register, or if they fail, to have a thorough explanation of the reasons why the member does not want to belong to the Party.

3. After this visiting of every non-registered member is completed, the unit bureau should, on the basis of the reports of the various groups, select the most able comrades of the section to re-visit those members who have given reasons for not registering.

It is inconceivable that such a large number of Party members are determined to stay out of the Party. There must be some basic weakness in organizing the registration in the units, and this weakness could be overcome very easily if the district, section committees and the unit bureaus seriously considered the problem of losing or gaining in this period, thousands and thousands of members for the Party.

In one big section in New York, about 100 members didn't register after the three weeks of registration. Can such a section give up these members, or isn't it their Communist duty to find ways and means of bringing these 100 workers, who have joined the Party and have stuck to it for a short or long period, back to the Party?

We are very much worried about the membership during the registration period but, during the whole year, we fail to provide the necessary organizational apparatus to keep the members. There are only a very few districts and sections where the membership committees are functioning properly. The units have no records of the members; they don't know who is transferred in; who is transferred out; who is recruited; who has dropped out; why, etc. etc. It is no wonder that when the registration period comes the unit bureaus, which are changed quite often, are forced to throw up their hands when the higher committees, who have more or less adequate record of the membership, give them the number of members they should have on their rolls.

Arguments are going on between the unit and the district on the figures; the lower bodies always denying that they have so many members in the Party. They have no record. They

only guess. And their guess is based more or less on the attendance, or dues payments, which are by no means convincing facts in deciding the number of members in the unit. There are scores of members in every unit and section who consider themselves Party members, are doing good work in one or the other mass organizations, but who don't come to unit meetings, don't pay dues for a long period. These members are entirely forgotten by the unit bureau, but are on the record of the higher committees.

We have to take very serious steps to establish a reliable administration in each unit. The Central Committee issued a special membership record book for each unit, handled by the membership director of the unit, concerning the membership of the unit. On this record, the membership director or secretary will have to enter every member of the unit—the new members recruited, members transferred in—mark their attendance regularly at every unit meeting in the column provided for that purpose, and mark those members who, after thorough examination, were dropped from the Party or expelled for some disciplinary measures. If this book is kept up to date, there will be no problem in the future of checking the membership. The unit bureau will be able to know at any time, not only the number of members in the unit, but also the individuals who are active in the unit and those who, for one reason or another, dropped out of the Party, or transferred to another Party organization.

It is understood that the names and addresses of the members must be properly safeguarded in every unit.

The present registration material could be used very effectively in building and strengthening the Party, especially in the factories and mass organizations. The material gained from the registration should be studied seriously by the district, section and unit leadership. If we find somebody in an important factory, he should be especially coached to recruit from that factory new members for the Party. If we find somebody in an important mass organization or union, special efforts should be made to help him to get Party members from the organization to which he belongs.

After every registration in districts where the material is seriously studied, we build scores of new shop units. We find in the registration material people who work in the same factory or industry and they belong to different units of the Party. The registration will help us to bring them together in

one unit. The district and sections should analyze the registration and seriously consider the composition of the membership and the steps to be taken in order to improve it.

The registration must be used for a thorough examination of the personnel (unit bureaus, section committee members). We will find very interesting facts about the leadership in the lower organizations. In New York in one section, the comrades found out that the large percentage of the unit leadership is composed of members who are only a few months in the Party, without any previous experience in organization, while there are scores of very able, loyal, developed Party comrades with years of experience in the Party and other mass organizations who are not being used.

One of the main problems we are facing now in connection with the registration is to get the 30-35 percent unregistered members back to the Party. Wide publicity in every Party publication we have, including the *Daily Worker*, will help us to achieve the goal of registering every Party member.