

# For Improving the Work of the Party Among the Foreign-Born Workers

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(Speech Delivered at the Eighth Convention of the Communist Party of the U. S. A.)

THE draft resolution submitted to the Eighth Party Convention dealing with the tasks of the Party, states:

"The central task of the Party is to organize and lead the fight against the offensive of the capitalist class, against developing fascism, and the threat of imperialist war, and to develop these struggles, on the basis of the fight for the immediate partial demands of the workers, into general class battles for the overthrow of capitalist dictatorship and the setting up of a Soviet government. This requires a quickening of the tempo and improvement in the quality of the work of the Party, to fight for the *winning of the majority of the working class* by more quickly carrying through the decisions of the Open Letter with regard to *rooting the Party among the basic strata of the proletariat, in the most important industries and factories, through the application of the policy of concentration.*" (Emphasis mine—F.B.)

This is the central problem that we are discussing at this Convention. The solution of this central task depends on our ability to improve the quality of the work of the Party as the prerequisite for winning the majority of the working class. The key to the solution of this problem is given by the Open Letter; it is through the application of the policy of concentration that the Party will succeed in rooting itself among the basic strata of the proletariat and in so doing win the majority of the working class.

There is no doubt that we have made some headway since the policy of the Open Letter has been applied, that the policy of concentration has proven correct in practice. It is true, however, that something is lacking as regards the tempo and the quality of Party work. The task of this Convention, therefore, is to make the Party conscious of the necessity of speeding up. The effects of the N.R.A., as foreseen by our Party, are here. Large masses are in motion again. The old illusions in the N.R.A., in the role of the

“Democratic” President, are crumbling one by one. The daily struggles of the C.W.A. workers, of the unemployed, are struggles against the N.R.A.

The moment that we seriously approach the problem of rooting the Party among the basic strata of the proletariat, we cannot ignore one of the questions with which I want to deal specifically.

While the draft resolution states correctly that the key to the building of the Party is “the rooting of the Party in the factories and in the most important industries, winning especially the native white and Negro workers”, we cannot ignore the role of the foreign-born masses, especially in the basic industries where they still constitute a majority.

#### THE FOREIGN-BORN TOILERS A REVOLUTIONARY FACTOR

The foreign-born masses are undergoing rapid radicalization. Millions of them are unemployed. They are discriminated against in the industries and by the relief agencies; they are persecuted and deported. Furthermore, with the aid of the foreign-born petty bourgeoisie, the ruling class is trying to keep the foreign-born workers under the influence of its ideology. Today all reactionary forces among the foreign-born masses are mobilized to check their rapid radicalization. The foreign-born workers are today fighting shoulder to shoulder with their native white and Negro brothers in the industries, in front of the relief stations, on the C.W.A. jobs; they are awakened to the consciousness of being part and parcel of the American working class. We see, therefore, that the foreign-born workers constitute a revolutionary factor of the utmost importance. The winning over of the foreign-born masses depends on our ability to apply the policy of concentration and to speed up the tempo along the line of the Open Letter.

At the Extraordinary Party Conference we laid the emphasis on the following tasks:

1. To orientate the foreign-born workers under Party influence towards winning their fellow workers in the factories on the basis of their immediate needs;
2. To apply more energetically the united front tactic to win over the masses of foreign-born workers organized in the hundreds of organizations under the reactionary leadership, on the basis of the struggle for unemployment and social insurance, against discrimination and deportations, against fascism and war.

This was a step forward in comparison with the decisions of the Seventh Convention. At that time, in outlining the task of the Party among the foreign-born masses, we were guided by the

general aim of the Party to win the majority of the workers for the revolutionary class struggle. Yet, at that time we were concerned especially with the struggle against the Right tendencies in the mass organizations around the Party, with the struggle against specific forms of nationalism and chauvinism which manifested themselves, with the struggle against federationist tendencies, etc. We were struggling to bring them closer to the Party and make of them instruments, not of separating the foreign-born working masses from one another and from the native workers, but of drawing them together by developing their revolutionary consciousness. It was at this time that we defined the task of the language fractions to make of them the driving force of the language mass organizations under the Party influence.

#### THE PERIOD OF CONSOLIDATION

The period between the Seventh Convention and the Extraordinary Party Conference can be characterized as a period of consolidation of the forces under the Party influence among the foreign-born workers, a period in which the Party was victorious over the past strong tendencies of federationism, a period in which we succeeded in consolidating the forces around the Party and started to move forward by making these forces a factor for penetration, for winning new strata of foreign-born workers.

Since the Extraordinary Party Conference, we have moved a little faster; but we are still behind schedule, behind the radicalization of these masses which has expressed itself in their daily struggles, in their rebellion against the nationalists; we are still behind the tempo of the fascist agents in their efforts to check this movement.

Let me present here, a few figures that indicate the tempo of growth of the language mass organizations and language press between the two Conventions and especially since the time of the Open Letter. The approximate membership in the language mass organizations under Party influence, including the Language Sections of the International Workers Order, was:

1930—48,000  
 1933—123,000 (Extraordinary Party Conference)  
 1934—133,000

The number of Party members in these organizations:

1933—5,000  
 1934—7,000

The approximate number of readers of the daily and weekly language press (exclusive of magazines and reviews):

1930—110,000

1933—127,000

1934—142,000

Gains in building the opposition inside the language organizations still under the control of the reactionaries were made especially by the Armenian, Slovak, Roumanian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Hungarian, and, to some extent, by the Polish and Italian comrades.

For example, in the past year the Slovak comrades have succeeded in gaining influence among the thousands of members of the Slovak national organizations. The Roumanian comrades have also made splendid headway.

From the figures, it is evident that the language organizations have not only consolidated their position in the last few years, but that since the Open Letter they have registered some real gains.

From approximately 50,000 members in 1930 we have reached a total of 130,000 in 1934. We have a gain of over 10,000 since the Open Letter. Furthermore, since the Open Letter, through the activities of the fractions, more than 2,000 members of these organizations were recruited into the Party.

It is important to note the headway made, especially in the building of the Polish Chamber of Labor, in the building of a whole series of Greek, Italian and Jugoslav workers' clubs, which shows the big possibilities in this field. We should especially note the big gains made by the International Workers Order since last year.

With the exception of the *Freiheit* (Yiddish) and the Finnish press, there are real gains to be registered, especially in the Greek, Ukrainian, Italian and Chinese papers. In the other languages, such as the Jugoslav, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak, the press is more consolidated, with gains to show. The new weekly and monthly subscriptions are increased. In the last few years, the whole language press has improved, not only politically, but also technically and financially. In spite of the crisis, all of the papers are today on a much sounder financial basis. Thousands of the old expired subscriptions were discontinued or renewed and new thousands made. The gains since the Open Letter speak for themselves.

The language press was instrumental in the consolidation and growth of the language mass organizations and the International Workers Order, and in drawing the mass organizations into all Party campaigns. However, the gains of the language press are not in step with the growth of the mass organizations.

HOW THE PARTY REACTED TO THE OPEN LETTER IN THE  
LANGUAGE FIELD

From the reports made by the language buros of the Central Committee we can see that practically all organizations have started to use the connections in the shops and in the organizations to build the revolutionary unions and the opposition in the American Federation of Labor as well as to organize the youth and children.

From the report of the Czechoslovakian Buro we read:

“Our main task and activities were and will be to build a united front for social and unemployment insurance as well as against war and fascism. In the National Slovak Society we succeeded in building an opposition group for the special convention of the National Slovak Society, and sent rank-and-file members to represent the branches. We also succeeded in the election of new officers to the National Office with a few rank-and-file delegates elected. In Newark, N. J., members of the I. W. O. fraction, under the guidance of the Party, were instrumental in building a Leather Workers Industrial Union. In Salem, Ohio, the Slovak fraction in the Sanitary Company was instrumental in building a union. In Chicago great help was given by the Slovak fractions in building the Furniture Workers Industrial Union and the opposition in the A. F. of L. bakery union. Other cities are following in these steps, increasing their activities along the line laid down by the Extraordinary Conference.”

From the reports of the Scandinavian Buro we read:

“Correctly orientated along the line of the decisions of the Extraordinary Party Conference, the Scandinavian Workers Clubs in Jamestown were instrumental in helping the forces of the Party to draw 1,000 members into the revolutionary unions. In Rockford, Ill., our club is also working to organize the workers. This can also be said of Worcester, Mass. These places are mentioned especially because we have there a large number of Scandinavian workers and a weak Party organization. Otherwise all our organizations are taking part in the general activities for the organization of workers into the trade unions.”

The Greek Buro tells of the work “of some of the Greek clubs as instruments in helping to build the revolutionary unions, in helping to organize the unorganized Greek workers in the various industries . . . .”

From the reports it is evident that all mass organizations are participating in practically all the campaigns of the Party, that they have contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to the movement, and that real efforts are being made to penetrate the organizations led by the reactionaries. Still, we are far from getting the results that we could and should get in building new workers' clubs, new workers' centers able to lead the struggles of the masses in their

neighborhoods and be instrumental in building the revolutionary unions and the unemployed organizations.

With little effort the Italian comrades, in the course of one year, succeeded in building many workers' clubs and today face the problem of uniting them into a federation. But while the members of some of these clubs were instrumental in organizing C.W.A. workers, as is the case of the Italian Club on the West Side of New York, while they developed the first strike of the C.W.A. workers at Bear Mountain bridge, the fractions in the clubs and the Italian Buro itself are lagging behind.

In the report of the Italian Buro we read:

"We have not yet learned to be systematic in our work, with the result that, with the exception of the International Workers Order branches, our clubs, etc., are growing in number, but, generally speaking, are far from developing into mass organizations embracing thousands of workers. This fact is important, since it shows better than anything else the gulf between the process of radicalization of the Italian masses and our conscious effort to guide this process and crystalize it in organizational results. Workers' clubs are springing up daily, often spontaneously."

What does this show? It shows that the Italian comrades are not yet conscious of their task of mobilizing and organizing the Italian masses, especially of penetrating the large mutual-aid organizations under fascist leadership. The fact that *L'Unita Operaia* doubled its circulation in one year shows that the masses are moving faster than our Italian comrades.

From the report of the Lithuanian Buro we read:

"It seems to us that no serious attempt is being made on the part of the revolutionary unions to use the mass organizations and their valuable contacts. The membership of these organizations is 95 per cent composed of workers mainly of the heavy industries—coal and steel. On our part also there were no serious attempts made for involving these mass organizations in the formation of the trade unions. This situation must be remedied. In every city the Party committees should make it their task to guide the fractions in the mass organizations, to get contacts and involve the mass organizations in the struggle for revolutionary unionism."

Here again we see that the line of the Open Letter is not applied sufficiently, that with coordination of the work between the language buros and the local Party committees, through improving the press, our results could be a hundred-fold greater.

From the reports it is clear that real results were achieved in those language fields where not only the language buros, but also the District and Section Committees, have carried out the line of the Party in the language work. On the other hand, where the line of

the Open Letter was not applied energetically by the language buros, especially by the local Party committees, there the results are not only nil, but the old nationalist, federationist tendencies, which we were successful in smashing previously, have raised their head again. For instance, it is very interesting that at the Extraordinary Party Conference we took Youngstown as an example to prove what can be done by correct application of the Party line in the mass organizations. We pointed out that in Youngstown, or in any small industrial town of the East, national composition of the foreign-born workers in the mills, factories, etc., reflects to a great extent the composition of the mass organizations of the foreign-born workers. While in the factories these workers are united, their national organizations divide them. Furthermore, we show how through a correct utilization of the mass organizations in such towns as Youngstown this can become instrumental in the organization of the workers into the revolutionary trade unions. But what was the situation in Youngstown till a few months ago? Comrade John Roman in a pre-Convention article states:

“But why the isolation? Is it because we don’t do work? No. Primarily because we go at it in the wrong way, *because of our failure to link up our activities in the language field with the basic tasks of the Party.* Do our language forces in the Youngstown Section properly participate or engage in systematic work in the factories, among the steel workers, on C.W.A. jobs? Are they doing work among the unemployed? Are they working systematically in the reactionary organizations, where the great masses of indifferent, misled workers are left to the mercy of the reactionaries, the fascists? National experiences on the language field show that where this was done, the isolation of our language movement began to disappear, and new masses began to flock toward us . . .

“There is complete lack of understanding of this on the language field in the Youngstown Section.

“There is a very low level of political understanding, irregular attendance and participation in the so-called general Party work, a shrinking from any activity that is not within the narrow shell of ‘society doings’. Their activities in the main are those of the old line of federalationalism—that is, limited to associating with their old friends, seeing the same faces year in year out, having a dance and lecture here and there and, of course, giving financial support to their language press.

“Needless to say, in a Section where the overwhelming majority of the basic proletariat is foreign-speaking, where almost the whole Section membership is that of the ‘language forces’, such a situation as that in Youngstown is more than intolerable.”

In an industrial town, like Youngstown, where the majority of the steel workers are foreign-born and the overwhelming majority of the population is composed of steel workers and their families,

where the mass organizations are reduced to "society doings" in the midst of unemployment and wage-cuts, instead of being the lever for building the revolutionary union, such a situation is the result of the lack of carrying on the Party line in this field of work, is the result of a lack of understanding of this problem by the local Party committees.\*

THE ROLE OF LEADING COMMITTEES AND FRACTIONS—THE  
WEAKNESS IN THE APPLICATION OF THE  
UNITED FRONT TACTIC

The general weakness which must be overcome by the Party in this field of work, is to establish the responsibility of the leading local Party committees for the application of the Party line through the fractions in the mass organizations.

While in the past year, and practically since the Seventh Convention, we have to register an improvement in the functioning of the leading fractions in the mass organizations, of the language buros, the fractions in the branches are not functioning politically, they do not fight for the Party line in reaching the masses in the factories. The primary reason is the weak understanding of the role of the fraction, the fact that the Party members inside these organizations are not guided in their work by the District and Section Committees, that the activities of the fractions are not checked by the local Party committees. The line of the Party is simply given by the language buros or by the leading fractions, and this is taken up by the members themselves.

This shows the good reaction of the masses, but it also shows the weak understanding of the fraction, that it is the fraction in the branch or club that must be the driving force for the concretization of the line into practice. The struggle for the united front in the language field proves the correctness of this statement. It is noticeable how some of the language fractions or groups of Party members, in applying the united front policy correctly, were able to organize thousands of workers in opposition to the reactionary leadership in their organizations. On the other hand, where the work of the fractions in the mass organizations is weak, we missed great opportunities of reaching wide masses of workers. This is the case especially with the German and Jewish fractions. Among the German and Jewish masses we lost a splendid opportunity to build a mass movement on the basis of struggle against German fascism and for the defeat of the social-fascists. In this respect we must

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\* Today, with a correct orientation by the Section Committee as well as in the language field, we notice, in Youngstown, a complete change.

state that our Jewish organizations, especially the *Freiheit*, did not energetically struggle for the united front policy, for winning over large strata of the Jewish masses, that it did not sufficiently take the offensive against the *Forward* and the social-fascists. This is also one of the reasons that the *Freiheit* did not keep up the tempo of growth of other language organs of our Party. The same can be said of the German organizations and *Der Arbeiter*, and more or less of all mass organizations and the language press.

Another phase of our language work in which the weakness of the fractions manifests itself: While in the last few years we stressed continuously the necessity of building the mass organizations around the Party on the basis of their own program, and the necessity to participate in the campaigns of the Party, today we can notice some tendencies of an exaggerated independence which, if not checked, will result in a drifting away from the various campaigns of the Party. While there is no doubt that in the last year the International Workers Order, for example, made splendid progress, that it succeeded in recruiting 16,000 new members from October to January, in many instances, however, many workers were recruited more on the basis of insurance than on the basis of the program of the I.W.O. which combines the program of insurance with the program of class struggle. It is noticeable that in the recruiting drive of the I.W.O. the leading committees and the language press played the primary role, while the fractions in the branches did not respond as well as the non-Party members. This is because Party members inside the I.W.O. are not clear on the task of the fractions and in many instances because of the lack of enlightenment by the District and Section Committees on their role, on the importance of the I.W.O., not only as a mass organization based on the program of class struggle, but as an organization that has to be built as the trench of the revolutionary unions. There is no doubt in my mind that in Ambridge, for example, at the time of the strike, if the steel workers had been organized into the I.W.O., the masses would have still been united and organized in a class struggle organization, in spite of the smashing of the union by the bosses and government. The fact that the Communist vote ran into the hundreds in spite of the terror in the municipal election, shows clearly the role of the mass organizations around the Party. In general, the Party members inside the mass organizations do not see the importance of fraction work, not only to check the danger of an exaggerated independence on the part of the mass organizations in drifting away from the various Party campaigns which is the first step towards drifting away from the Party line, but also

because of the importance of the fractions in the perspective of growing reaction and illegality.

It is especially in such a period that the fractions become the Party organizations that remain strongly connected with the masses.

Today the mass organizations under the leadership of the reactionary forces are becoming instrumental in helping the Roosevelt Administration in putting through his program of fascization. This is more than evident from the activities of the various fascist agents in this country, from the role of the foreign bourgeois press.

#### OUR MAIN TASKS IN THE FOREIGN-LANGUAGE FIELD

We cannot be satisfied with our gains of the past year. *We have to forge the language mass organizations around the Party into more powerful instruments* for reaching the wide masses of foreign-born, for taking the lead among the foreign-born masses in the struggle against fascism and war, against social-fascism. *They must be instrumental in uniting the foreign-born with the rest of the American working class in the struggle against the effects of the N.R.A., which means they must be forged into instruments, into levers, for building the revolutionary unions, for building the opposition in the American Federation of Labor, into instruments for reaching the masses in the factories, in the mines; they must develop the struggle against discrimination, against deportation; they must especially penetrate the masses of the organizations led by the reactionary forces through applying the united front policy on all the immediate demands that concern the foreign-born workers.* In this respect, the foreign-language press, as stated in the draft resolution, must be extended, popularized, and become mass organs for combatting national separation. *They must fight against fascist propaganda carried on by the American fascists and those of European countries and be a means of drawing the foreign-born workers into the main stream of the class struggle, into the Communist Party and the mass organizations, particularly the trade unions.* There must be a wider issuance and circulation of literature on current political problems and propaganda pamphlets dealing with the revolutionary way out of the crisis. In this respect the example of the Jewish Buro which since the Open Letter has issued some 15 pamphlets in about 100,000 copies, and of the Ukrainian Buro which has issued pamphlets in 55,000 copies, must be followed by the language buros and mass organizations.

Since the Seventh Party Convention we have laid emphasis on the necessity of penetrating especially among the Polish, Italian,

German, Yugoslav and Spanish-speaking masses. Yet we have moved very slowly. Very few forces have been developed in these language fields. In this respect one of the major tasks in the language field is the intensification of the struggle against the increased activities of the German, Italian, Yugoslav, and Polish fascists and the mobilization of all forces under our influence for the penetration and organization of the workers in those language fields.

Furthermore, *we must seriously tackle the problem of winning the large masses of Spanish-speaking workers that are moving very fast, that, especially in the Southwest, are crying for Communist literature, for Communist organizers.* Since the Open Letter, through the application of the Party line in the youth field, the mass organizations were able to build youth sections with over 5,000 members, which shows that organizations of foreign-born workers can be instrumental in reaching the American youth. This line not only has to be followed, *but the activities of the mass organizations in this direction must be intensified to the utmost.* To accelerate the process, more workers' clubs have to be built. More energy must be given to building the I.W.O. and the rest of the mass organizations, and to building the circulation of the Party press. And above all, the fractions must be made conscious of their role.

Around the Party there are today mass organizations embracing over 500,000 organized workers, not taking into consideration the Left-Wing forces in the A. F. of L. unions, the farmers' organizations, the various cultural organizations, etc. These organizations can and must become powerful instruments for mobilizing and organizing the large masses of American toilers; they must become levers in the hand of the Party for winning the majority of the working class. In this respect the language mass organizations must become the levers for moving the foreign-born masses to march shoulder to shoulder with their exploited brothers, the native Negro and white workers, in the class battles along the road of the working class way out of the crisis, along the road to Soviet America.