

The Branch and Trade Union Activity

By Rose Wortis

NEW YORK STATE has an organized labor movement of close to 2,000,000. The membership of the Party and Y.C.L., including the new recruits, is about 35,000. More than half of our comrades are trade unionists—between 17,000 and 18,000. Working amongst the 2,000,000 workers, they are still a minority. If, however, this group could be fully activated in the trade union movement, it would become a powerful force in helping the labor movement to achieve its objectives and advancing labor in the life of the nation. Unfortunately, only a small part of the 18,000—in the main, the comrades organized in the industrial branches—consider trade union work their major responsibility. The majority of our trade union comrades, scattered throughout the neighborhood branches, are disconnected from the comrades active in their trade union. They are often not even known to other Communists working in the same shop.

This greatly reduces the effectiveness of the Communists in the trade unions and opens the way for all sorts of disruptive forces—the Coughlinites, Trotskyites and die-hard “Social Democrats”—to demoralize the workers and weaken the war effort. In recent months this has become especially serious in some of the basic war industries, such as shipyard, aircraft, etc.

The Neighborhood Branch Is the Key

The Party has attempted to find ways and means of activating our people in the trade unions. Thus far we have met with only partial success because our main efforts were amongst those comrades who are organized into industrial branches. In the neighborhood branches, embracing the overwhelming majority of the membership, we have not begun to solve the problem with any degree of effectiveness. Despite our discussions there is still a prevailing opinion in

most of the Party organization that the responsibility for education, leadership and guidance of our trade union and shop workers rests exclusively with the Trade Union Department and the Industrial Division. So long as this concept continues, we will not be able to make our maximum contribution in helping to solve the many problems in the trade union movement decisive to the prosecution of the war.

Today large numbers of our comrades, formerly active in neighborhood branches, are in basic industry. Most of our neighborhood branches have not as yet fully recognized the importance of this changed composition of our Party. There have been many instances where branch organizers were almost ready to write off comrades who secured jobs in war industries and who because of their long hours or different shifts could no longer function actively in their neighborhood branch.

Greatest Attention to Trade Unionists

The job of a neighborhood branch is to provide leadership for all its comrades, those who work in trade unions no less than those who are active in neighborhood organizations. In fact, those in trade unions deserve the greatest attention, for they work among proletarian masses, the most decisive section of the population. Many of them have the opportunity every day to influence scores and even hundreds of workers. They can help shape policies of great trade unions. They can aid in the solution of basic war problems—the problems of production.

It is therefore of the utmost importance that our branches and sections begin to discuss ways and means of giving better and more detailed attention to their shop and union workers, the soldiers on the home front. Our trade union comrades should feel that they can come to the branches and sections with their problems, for help and advice. Discussions in our branches must include the developments and trends in the trade union movement, as well as various special problems and the means for their solution.

Among the new recruits, we have thousands of young and enthusiastic comrades trained in the discipline of the shops. With a little attention from the leadership of the branches

and the sections, these comrades can become good Communists by becoming better trade unionists.

There are many comrades in our Party, old tried unionists, who have gone through the mill but who never asserted themselves in the leadership of their respective branches. These comrades must be drawn more actively into the leadership of the branches as trade union directors, shop work directors and branch organizers, to help our Party organization become more sensitive to trade union problems and thus improve our mass work in this most important field, thereby further building and strengthening our Party and its ties with the masses.

... all we must require as conditions of membership are the following four points:

- 1. Agreement with party program and activity in applying it where one is active.*
- 2. Participation in some phase of war work.*
- 3. Reading of the party press, especially the "Daily Worker."*
- 4. Payment of dues and membership in a branch, but not compulsory regular attendance.*

—Williamson.