

Opportunities for Shop Nuclei Work

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Article V.

QUICK and decisive action by a shop nucleus membership is necessary when solutions of real problems are demanded. The class struggle is warfare, well planned and well organized from the employers' side. They never hesitate to use the most drastic measures. The workers must be taught to move in the same tempo and to be as well prepared.

It should not be necessary to emphasize that whenever the workers of a shop, in which a party nucleus exists, receive notice of wage cuts or some similar infringement upon working conditions, that whenever something of importance occurs, the shop nucleus should meet as quickly as possible and decide its plan of action. The members should always be well acquainted with the sentiment of the workers. They should know whether or not a strike is possible. Or if some other means of demonstration or resistance is required they should know to what degree the workers are ready to respond.

In all such actions the shop nucleus must obtain the leadership.—"Impossible," our members may say, "we have no experience—we do not speak English well." Many other objections or excuses may be brought forward. But to show what actually can be accomplished in such situations it would perhaps be well to cite the experience of the party membership functioning in a large industrial plant. Incidentally this citation may also serve as a good example of practical tactics to pursue to gain leadership of strikes of workers in unorganized plants. In this instance, as we shall see, the party membership assumed complete leadership.

First Steps in a Strike.

It was in the Pressed Steel Car company's plant at McKees Rocks, Pa. Ordinarily the plant employs between six and seven thousand workers. It would be no exaggeration to say that for a Communist nucleus it is as difficult a place to work within as

any. It has witnessed severe battles during its history. In 1909 during a great strike in the plant some 14 men were killed, most of them workers, but also some Pennsylvania cosacks, who had to bite the dust as a reward for their atrocities.

During the latter part of April of last year notices were posted in the plant that the regular nine-hour day would henceforth be increased to nine and a half. The workers struck. About two-thirds walked out immediately and more followed. The first day of the walkout two party members came to the district office, told their story and asked for speakers for the gathering which they assumed would take place the following morning.

The two party organizers went out that morning and found several thousand strikers gathered. Short talks were made and a few organizational steps suggested. Actual results could not be obtained immediately as unorganized workers in plants where many nationalities are employed naturally move with difficulty.

On the third day definite organizational steps were proposed—a strike committee composed of one delegate from each of the 17 departments of the plant. The strikers, however were not yet trained to function for such activities and it became largely a matter of accepting volunteers for the committee. After the meeting the committee got together to formulate its plans and decide to make the following demands:

1. No further wage cuts.
2. The nine-hour day (instead of the 9½ demanded by the company).
3. No discrimination against any striker.
4. Maintenance of the committee as a shop committee.

A serious mistake occurred in selection of chairman and spokesman of the committee, which, however was accounted for by the lack of experience of the workers and the members of the committee not being well acquainted with one another. He was a company tool and when the committee appeared at the office the man-

agement refused to see any one but him.

On the following day, Saturday, May 1, none of the party organizers could be present and the chairman of the committee advised the workers to go back on the old conditions threatening that otherwise the plant would be closed down completely for a long time to come. This created great confusion, some decided to go back others not to. The situation became serious. Quick action was necessary. Sunday morning the twenty-two party members, who then were divided into three language branches, Russian Ukrainian and South Slavic, were called to a meeting and the following plan of action put into effect. Each language group was instructed to visit all active strikers and urge them to come to the Monday morning strike meeting organized in groups to first of all chase the strike committee chairman off the platform and secondly to work up favorable sentiment for measures to be proposed by the party speaker who would follow on the platform.

Party Leads Strike.

Everything went according to plans. On Monday morning about 5,000 strikers attended the meeting. The chairman stepped on the platform, but did no sooner open his mouth to speak than he was told in no uncertain terms to get off and stay off. This demand came from groups scattered in the crowd. It increased in volume. He grew pale stepped down and admitted he was thru. The party speaker got on the platform was greeted by applause, started by organized groups growing stronger and stronger. A splendid sentiment was created. The speaker proceeded to tell of the necessity to organize a new strike committee by each department actually electing its own delegates. The committee was constituted, a few party members being on it, a party member elected chairman and the previous program again adopted. The strikers meant business, while some, of course, returned to work the committee appeared each day to press its demands and finally

the management consented to a conference.

While the company could not be induced to give guarantees against further wage reductions it did agree however that the 9½ hour work day would be abolished with the termination of the daylight saving period, that there would be no discrimination against any of the strikers and that the men may maintain their committee.

The strikers voted to accept these terms and went back to work in a body. Of course, workers can never rely upon the promises of a management of unorganized shops as promises are good only when the workers themselves have the power to enforce it. Nevertheless the fact that the management in a large plant of this character agreed to negotiate with a committee representing the strikers and agreed to some of the terms was a signal victory for these men. More than that, the conduct of this fight went a long way to establish among these 5,000 strikers a real confidence in their united power. And what is of the greatest significance they learned to appreciate the organized systematic activities in behalf of their class interests of the group of Communists. The party gained prestige. These men became interested to learn more of its program. Several made application for membership. Only the complete closing down of the plant a couple of months later prevented a real shop nucleus being established at the time.

Nuclei Do Real Work.

This work was accomplished by twenty-two party members none of whom could speak English very well or had any great experience in conducting a struggle of such magnitude, and shows what can be done by active party members working and functioning as a unit in a shop. It should serve as an encouragement for shop nuclei to concentrate on the very important field of obtaining leadership of the many strikes in the unorganized industries and direct the struggles of these workers against the exploitation of capitalism.