

Organizational Problems

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(Continued from last issue)

CHAPTER IV

The need of simplicity of methods and of approach to the problems of building our party is apparent. To become effective exponents of Communism and to actually organize the workers for the overthrow of capitalism, we must learn how to connect the struggle for our ultimate aims with that of the elementary needs of the workers.

Our members too often overlook these needs, although being employed in the shops themselves, because the everyday abuses caused by the system of exploitation have become so habitual and ordinary. While this is too often accepted merely as a part of wage slavery, it is precisely the things which are objectionable to the workers. The objections, however, are not given expression.

It is the duty of our shop nuclei to take up these issues, formulate the proper demands and correct slogans. But so simplified that a few are concentrated on and couched in the language of the workers. These issues should be taken up through our various means of activities, and particularly through the shop bulletin. Properly conducted they will serve to establish wide contact with the workers and gradually move them into action against their class enemies. There are for example the following issues:

1.—Speed-up System and Long Hours of Work.

In most of the industrial enterprises of the country, production is standardized, the individual output being ever increased. Various devices are applied to increase the speed of the motions of the workers, in addition to foremen driving them to the point of exhaustion. Most places long hours obtain with a shift system. Sometimes double shifts with no extra pay for night work. Yet when work is slack the speed does not diminish and seldom are the hours reduced, but workers are rather placed on part time employment while the industrial reserve army waits at the gate for jobs. Thus increasing the competition of the workers and further intensifying the speed-up system. Shop nuclei must here take up the question of getting rid of slave driving bosses, reduce hours of work, point to the need of organization of the workers and solidarity with the unemployed.

2.—Health and Safety Conditions.

In the factories many conditions obtain dangerous to the health of the workers. Lack of ventilation, use of poisonous materials, insanitary toilet and washroom facilities, etc. Lack of safety devices make accidents daily occurrences. Compensations for accidents generally mean a maze of red tape and graft by petty politicians. In this respect shop nuclei can be instrumental in leading the fight for healthy conditions and for real safety devices and assist workers or their relatives who are victims of accidents to obtain their compensation.

3.—Violation of Working Agreements.

This is a problem mainly of shops of organized workers. With unorganized workers the bosses make no agreements. Violations often occur as a result of demands that workers prepare their own material not specific in the agreement or carry heavier loads than specified; or in many other ways. Discrimination generally results where objections to such practice is made. If not through actual lay-offs, then often in assignment to lesser paid or more disagreeable work. Such violations of agreements in reality becomes a reduction of wages. While the violations also often have a direct connection with co-operation of trade union officials who sell out the interests of the workers and co-operate with the bosses.

Schemes of so-called adjustment through adjustment boards, arbitration, or permanent labor boards generally further discriminate against the workers in favor of the bosses. A fight against such violations, discriminations and the schemes to uphold them broadens the basis of shop activities as well as the ranks of the fighting forces. It often makes possible the establishment of effective connections from shop to shop in the same industry. A part of the fight must be the exposure of the corrupt practices of trade union officials where such is the case.

4.—Fight Against Wage Cuts.

Wage cuts are ordinary occurrences whether applied on the hourly rate or piece work rate. The first task of shop nuclei members should be to understand the nature of the cuts, gather the necessary statistics to strengthen the case of the workers and proceed to organize resistance. This gives a particular opportunity for party members to explain the system of exploitation of the workers, proceeding from a concrete basis and will generally bring ready response from the workers concerned. While in the organized shops, the fight should be conducted through the unions, in unorganized shops the fight becomes directly bound up with the problem of organization of the workers and all actions must be properly organized. In each case, however, splendid opportunities are offered to Communists.

5.—Blacklist System, Spies and Special Police.

These are some of the usual methods maintained to keep the workers in subjection, particularly in large enterprises of heavy industry. Blacklists often appear in deliberate worked out job applications, some times

requiring personal descriptions and finger prints, while spies appear in the shops to help get the goods on the workers. The whole system in the United States often extends to embrace the local governmental institutions in smaller cities where big factories are located. While such conditions point to the need of caution of shop nuclei work, it will also particularly tax the ability of the members to expose this system and generally the fight will enter directly into the field of political struggles.

6.—Bosses' Welfare Associations.

Such associations appear in many forms and are but the first steps toward company unions. Sometimes they may have a sport character, social, or beneficial character. They are, however, always means of the bosses organized by them with especially fitted agents put in charge to help tie the workers to the factory wheel. With this follows generally stock selling schemes to make the workers believe they are part owners of the plant and thus readier accept whatever conditions are imposed. Otherwise the workers obtain little or no additional material gain for themselves, but it helps to divide their forces. An exposure of such hideous schemes is necessary to show the workers that real improvements can be gained only by united class efforts and not by false illusions of generosity of the bosses.

7.—Joint Works Committees and Company Unions.

Despite its name, Joint Works Committees supposedly representing both workers and bosses wherever such committees exist, they are merely instruments in the hands of the bosses. Sometimes the members supposedly representing the workers are elected by them and other times hand picked by the bosses. The final decision always rests with the management and the committees thus serve as a shield to make the workers believe they have something to say.

Company unions are, of course, outright tools of the bosses and organized particularly to prevent real working class organization in the shop. Secondly, they are organized to help keep the workers' conditions down and maintain a low rate of wages. In either event, it is necessary to both work from within and from without to expose these schemes and replace them with real workers' shop committees and real labor unions.

During elections of workers' delegates to so-called Joint Works Committees our shop nuclei should bring forward their own progressive candidates together with a program corresponding with the needs of the workers in the shop. The program, of course, cannot be realized by these committees, but it helps to expose them and lay the basis for real shop committees. As for "company unions," past history has proven that when a few live wires get busy inside they can make contact with the workers there and change the efforts of the bosses into real trade union organization.

8.—Workers' Shop Committees.

Being close to the rank and file workers, shop committees will easily become responsive to their needs and become real instruments in their struggles for better conditions. Creation of shop committees are one of our real tasks. The most important issues in the shop should be put forward as the basis of propaganda for election of shop committees. In organized shops, it should be done with the assistance of the unions. In unorganized shops, these committees will become the most effective organization instruments. Shop committees are composed of delegates elected by the workers only; and generally a certain number from each department in the industrial plant. At least this should be the basis of our propaganda to be particularly put forward when wage cuts are threatened or other encroachments in working conditions are made by the bosses.

While at certain periods the possibilities to establish shop committees may not be so very good, it should nevertheless be propagated at every opportunity. Naturally many difficulties will arise in attempting to put this into effect, but we must learn how to overcome such difficulties.

9.—Strikes.

Our shop nuclei members must ways participate in and be in front ranks of every strike. If in organized plants, the activity naturally concentrated through unions. With unorganized difficulties become great.

Strikes within unorganized are, however, very common. Lack of leadership and organization is apparent and leads to defeat. When important strikes appear in such shops, our shop members should always be familiar with the sentiment of the workers and their readiness to strike if a strike is impossible or some means of demonstration of resistance required. If strikes are possible, the first steps must be to organize to win the strike. Have the demands properly formulated. Select a strike committee through representation from each department. The committee should be authorized to communicate with the employers, report back to the workers and arrange for regular strike meetings, pickets, etc. The local party organization must be kept fully in touch with and guide the activities in such strike developments.