

Organizational Problems

By ARNE SWABECK.

CHAPTER VI—(Continued).

The Coal Mining Industry.

The miners' union, their locals being situated in small camps, has become not only a defensive economic organization of the members, but to a degree, the center of their social and political life. The members of the union all work together in the same mine when employed. It is an industrial union. The technique of the industry is far advanced, the employers well organized. An issue there cannot be localized to certain groups of workers, but becomes of vital concern to the union as a whole. Hence, the general great solidarity of the rank and file members of the coal miners' union and their advanced political level. The present status of the union, with general great unemployment and ever growing larger unorganized territory, a corrupt bureaucracy and the constant threat of the "open-shop," makes apparent the need of slogans which correspond with these elementary issues.

The Steel Industry.

The steel industry is perhaps the most highly developed industry organized into one gigantic trust while the workers remain practically entirely unorganized. Only one union exists, the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers, with less than 12,000 members, mostly highly skilled. There are a multitude of craft divisions, great variances between skilled and unskilled as far as wages, conditions and even political outlook is concerned. The greatest handicap for organization has been the jealousy between the craft unions claiming jurisdiction and the powerful, ferocious opposition of the employers.

Naturally, here the one vital need is the organization of the unorganized. The issues of organization become primarily the question of low wages, long hours and the high pressure of exploitation. The existing unions have not shown any genuine desire to organize the industry. They must be pressed into action. But yet, due to the present small degree of organization, the closest co-operation between the trade union fractions and party nuclei within the steel mills becomes necessary.

As an instrument of organization the development of shop committees is an imperative question.

The Building Trades.

The building industry while also technically highly developed, as far as construction methods are concerned, is nevertheless the classic field of craft unionism. While building construction is becoming ever more concentrated into the hands of large concerns, the contractors of the various trades, generally speaking, maintain contracts and agreements with the unions largely on a purely craft basis. The industry is not yet trustified. The employers are organized primarily on a craft basis and the unions have thus been able to gain considerable points of advantage through old time craft union methods. Jurisdictional disputes are common occurrences.

Our fractions in the building trades unions advance the slogan "Unity and Amalgamation of these craft unions." But it is necessary simultane-

ously to bring forward the issues of the crafts and to propose progressive trade measures as a means of establishing contact with the rank and file members and advance their interests. For example demands in regard to agreements, handling of tools and material, amount of work to be performed, hours, wages, union made material, union shop, etc. It is necessary more so because the building of a progressive movement, the fight against corrupt, reactionary officials and the organizing and strengthening of the unions is yet primarily on a craft basis.

It would be well at this point to mention the fact that in the clothing industry we find a much more developed trade union membership. This in itself, in many respects, changes our methods of work, as well as our policies and tactics, considerably from the other examples mentioned. Our general principal, however, remains unchanged.

Trade Union Fractions.

The structure of our Party trade union fractions follow the structure of the trade unions. As a basis, the local fraction is formed of our Party members in the local union. The local union fractions are connected along the line of the various unions by trade and by industry throughout the city, extending through the district or state and connected on a national basis. The main thing, however, is to build from the bottom in the local union and concentrate the life of the fractions not in Party offices but right in the unions. In central councils and joint boards our fractions are formed in the same manner. Each fraction, local, trade and industrial, should have its executive committees. It is as important here as for our nuclei in general, that the executive committee becomes a real leading body and initiates the proper measures corresponding with the problems of the fractions.

(To be continued)

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