

The Work of Trade Union Fractions in the Pre-Convention Discussion

How We Can Improve the Work of Party Fractions in the Trade Unions

Fractions Act in Too Narrow a Fashion in the Unions

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How Can We Improve the Work of Our Fractions in the Trade Unions?

One of the most important problems confronting the Party convention is the improvement of the trade union work. When we read through the weekly Party letter in the New York district we find many fraction meetings taking place. However, when we examine the revolutionary work done by these fractions in the trade unions we find many glaring weaknesses which were particularly manifest in the recent period when real Communist leadership was necessary to counteract the demagogue Roosevelt's New Deal.

How can we account for this? First because of the lack of political education on the part of the fractions. Despite the correct Party analysis of the N.R.A., the poisonous propaganda carried on by the government and the reformists about the N.R.A. as a new charter of labor penetrated the ranks of our fractions. Although this did not find open expression at the fraction meetings it seriously affected the Communist work of the fractions and the decisiveness with which our fractions carried on the struggle against the reformists. Even in the needle trades where we have the strongest and most advanced fraction, many comrades did not correctly estimate the result of the strikes. The comrades failed to understand that the improvements gained by the cloak and dressmakers were the direct result of the militant struggle of the workers in the A. F. of L. under left wing leadership, and the independent struggles of the industrial union. Our comrades did not utilize these gains to strengthen the confidence of the workers in their ability to wrest concessions from the bosses through struggles. Instead many members in our Party fractions became afflicted with defeatism and permitted the Lovestonites to take the offensive. This greatly hampered our work and made it possible for the bureaucracy and the bosses to lower the conditions of the workers.

Similar was our experience among the alteration painters after the recent strike.

In the shoe trade where our

union led the strike of 10,000 workers who had never been connected with our movement before, these workers just like the workers in all other trades had illusions about the N.R.A. Many of our Party comrades instead of being the driving force for combating these illusions, fell victim to them and permitted a situation where the hopes of the workers for a settlement of the strike were pinned on the N.R.A.

In the cleaning and dyeing trade our fraction, consisting of comrades of long standing in the Party, failed to expose the vacillating policy of the strike chairman and his secret negotiations with the officials of the A. F. of L. This undermined the morale of the workers and resulted in the loss of the strike.

In most other trades where we have an organized fraction our comrades were very weak in exposing the real character of the N.R.A., as for instance in the printers, where our comrades working in the left wing permitted an editorial to be printed in the "Printing Worker" which not only failed to clarify the correct position of the N.R.A. but even brought more confusion among the workers. In many trades the Party fractions at times were afraid to fight the illusions that existed among the workers. They were afraid to go against the tide.

Our fractions also underestimated the effect of the subtle propaganda of the renegade Lovestonites and Trotskyites who under the cover of their revolutionary phrases fully cooperated with the bureaucracy in their support of the N.R.A. This underestimation came as a result of our failure to understand that the danger of the renegades at this period lies not so much in their organizational strength (which is very weak) as in the reformist ideology which under cover of revolutionary phrases they spread in the ranks of the workers.

Thus we see that the Party fractions have not as yet become a real instrument for bringing the revolutionary policies before the non-Party masses. It is very important for the Party to take note of these weaknesses because we know that in the coming period as the attacks on the workers become sharper the bosses and reformist leaders will resort to even more subtle demagoguery by means of which they will aim to crush the rising revolt of the workers (Detroit strike, etc.). This is already seen in the introduction of the Connery 30-hour bill

and the Wagner bill, which seemingly is against company unions, but in reality aims to strengthen the arbitration machinery and outlaw strikes. Unless we take immediate steps to raise the political level of our fractions we will not be able to give real leadership in the coming struggles of the workers.

The second reason to account for the shortcomings of our fraction is the failure to properly understand their role in the trade unions. While it is true that the life of the fractions today is somewhat improved in the sense that we do not occupy ourselves to the same extent as in the past with routine union matters which could be thrashed out in the union, the fractions as yet do not function systematically as an instrument for clarifying the fundamental questions of policy and for winning the mass of workers in the unions for these correct policies. In most instances this is considered the task of the leadership of the union and not the fraction itself.

We often find rank and file comrades criticizing the leaders for not having correctly brought the viewpoint of the fraction before the union membership but at the same time the individual members consider themselves exempt from this task from the shoe workers. At one of the fraction meetings during the strike the comrades severely criticized the leadership for the failure to bring forward the face of the Party. But when the comrades were asked how many of them had recruited Party members, only two or three raised their hands.

Neither do the factions fully understand their role as the Party instrument for bringing the campaigns of the Party into the unions. The Party undertakes special campaigns such as the campaign against war, the campaign in support of the Communist Party of Germany, in support of the Cuban workers, Scottsboro, press campaign, etc. Since these campaigns involve the most vital interests of the working-class the Party of course approaches the trade unions and other mass organizations on the basis of the united front.

The same applies to the question of building the Daily Worker and the distribution of Party literature which could be of direct assistance to the Party fractions in carrying through their daily tasks in leading the struggles of the workers. The Daily Worker in the past few months has been greatly improved.

The most vital problems of the workingclass are discussed in the Daily Worker.

The Fractions and Party Units

The third reason is that there is too much separation between the fractions and the Party organization. The Party in the last few months has carried through some fundamental political discussions in the units, such as the discussion on the N.R.A., the lessons of Germany, the lessons of the Austrian revolution, discussions on the Negro problem, on the Soviet Union, the 13th Plenum, the Open Letter, etc. The aim of these discussions is to raise the political level of the comrades and prepare them for better leadership of the masses. However, many of the most active and loyal comrades, the real Party mass workers, are not present at these meetings and do not benefit by the training given to the comrades through the Party.

We find a situation, for instance, such as in the furniture workers where the Party fraction secretary had absented himself from unit meetings for more than a year. This is by no means an exception. This isolation from the direct Party life on the part of active trade unionists reacts unfavorably both on the Party and the fractions and develops a tendency toward pure and simple trade unionism. The active fraction members do not see the broader aspect of our struggle and the unit discussions are very often of an abstract character because of the absence of the real mass workers who could help to concretize these discussions on the basis of their experiences. The fault for this situation does not lie entirely with the fraction. The fact that many of the Party members are not as yet actively involved in trade union work throws the burden on a few who become so involved in the day to day economic struggles that they become isolated from the Party. Many comrades who participate in the discussions rarely consider it their duty to bring these discussions into the unions. In the unions they merely concern themselves with the immediate economic problems.

Party Recruiting

The same also applies to the question of Party recruiting. The Party has long recognized the trade unions as the best source of recruiting since many of these workers have already been involved in struggles under our leadership. Still we find thousands of sympathetic workers in the trade unions who

have never been approached by the Party fraction to join the Party. The recent recruiting campaign in New York City will show that very few comrades have been recruited directly through the efforts of the fractions. The Party member may spend hours going after a contact secured through the unit but this same comrade functioning in the trade union will overlook many sympathetic elements with whom he is in contact from day to day as material for the Party. So that hundreds of workers in full agreement with the line of the Party continue to be sympathizers instead of being active builders of the Communist Party. Another weakness is the absence of a leading fraction to coordinate the work of all fractions, exchange experiences, to the mutual benefit of all and thus avoid mistakes often repeated in one fraction after another. Until now all efforts to build such a fraction have not met with any cooperation from the leading comrades.

Until very recently the Party did not give sufficient attention to the life of the fractions. Leading Party comrades visited fraction meetings only when special problems came up. The Party must give more direct and systematic guidance to the fractions so as to help them become a real instrument for revolutionizing the masses. This can best be accomplished by developing political discussions in the fractions and to concretize these discussions on the basis of the specific conditions of the workers in the particular industry. In the recent period the New York district has given special attention to this question and already we can see very good results. In many of our fractions such as in the shoe, needle, furniture, technical men, etc., recruiting is now going on. The sale of the Daily Worker has improved and the Party campaigns are being brought into the unions as seen by the quick response to the campaign in the Austrian situation, the recent unemployed conference, etc.

The Org. Department of the district is now beginning to give more attention to building the trade union fractions. A number of active comrades from the A. F. of L. unions and the T.U.U.L. unions have been drawn into the Org. Department. A meeting of fraction secretaries has adopted a plan for activating the fractions and establishing a better relationship

Party Does Not Give Sufficient Guidance to the Fractions

between the sections, units and fractions. The following are the proposals:

Org. Dept. to designate a committee of three developed comrades to be in charge of trade union fractions. Arrangements to be made for one member to be in the district office every night between the hours of 1 and 2 to take up problems with fraction secretaries.

All fraction meetings to be booked at the district office. Org. Department to work out regular schedule of fraction meetings. Every fraction to designate a definite day for its leading fraction meeting at least once in two weeks and general fractions once a month.

A brief report on the attendance of the fraction meetings and the problems that come up to be given to the district once a month.

Each fraction to elect a special committee for the Daily Worker. Committee to be responsible for mobilizing the fraction to work in the particular union for increasing the circulation of the Daily Worker and workers correspondence.

Party recruiting to be placed as first order of business at every meeting and a brief check up on progress made.

Fraction secretary to check up on Party standing of members once in two months.

Every fraction to be made responsible for bringing various Party campaigns into the respective unions and to arrange for speakers whenever it is necessary.

Leading members of the Org. Department and District Bureau to attend every fraction meeting at least once in three months.

Org. Secretary to report at District Bureau on fraction work at least once in two months.

Joint meetings of all fraction secretaries with section org. secretaries to be organized once in two months. Important experience in which fundamental policy is involved to be discussed at these meetings and also at the special fraction meetings arranged by the org. committee for this purpose.

If this plan is followed up systematically we will correct some of the basic weaknesses in our fraction work and thus help to root the Party in the masses.