

Inner Unit Life and the Problem of Fluctuation

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ARTICLE II

In the first article we stressed the organizational aspect of the question of fluctuation. But we must emphasize that this is not purely an organizational matter. On the contrary it is a political matter of first importance.

Let us ask a few questions:

1. Why do older members of the Party, those who understand the Party, its political life and organizational structure, not attend unit meetings regularly? All of them are not busy on Tuesday night, at other meetings. All of them are not active in mass work. The older members could be of tremendous value in living up to the inner life of the unit and at the same time in guiding the new members of the Party in their work.

2. Why is it that many of the new workers who join the Party, coming in with enthusiasm, attend a few meetings, perform some functions and then drop out? We cannot answer this question by saying, "They are not Communists," because this is only an evasion of the fact that most workers who join the Party are not Communists. New members must be trained to be Communists through education and participation in struggle.

These manifestations we find in all units. Therefore we wish to present a few reasons that in our mind are responsible for fluctuation and for our inability to involve all members in the work of the Party:

Inner Life of Units

1. The inner life of the unit. This has been discussed over and over again at Party conventions, at District conventions, functionaries' conferences, etc. Although the life of some units has vastly improved, owing to the fact that there are one or two live members who are able to

give it life, we must admit that in general the life of the units is not what it should be. In many units there is no discussion whatever, the whole time of the meeting being taken up with organizational and technical matters. This must be recognized generally as improper functioning and not helping to draw the workers into the life of the Party.

At every unit meeting there should be discussion. The question is: What kind of discussion? The District sends outlines for discussion to the units, giving a general survey of the subject. At the end of the discussion outline the communication generally states that the discussion should be along the lines of the outline but is to be concretized for the work of the unit.

How is the discussion arranged? If there is a unit agit-prop director, he either undertakes the leading of the discussion himself, or proposes another comrade. The ability of the comrade to lead the discussion frequently may be questionable. But even if the report is good, it is impossible for the comrade to concentrate upon the main purpose of the discussion, namely the application of the line laid down in the outline to the work of the unit.

Purpose of Unit Discussion

As a rule, therefore, the discussion is considered either "interesting" or "not interesting." But that is the total value that the unit has derived from the discussion as a whole. The purpose of the discussion, however, is not only to educate the members of the Party, but also to improve their work. Therefore in my opinion, the discussion should be taken up first in the unit bureau as an essential part of the work of the bureau and of the unit, and the bureau decide what the program of action should be on the basis of the discussion. This will have the effect of politically educating the unit bureau, most of which are composed

of relatively new comrades of the Party, and make them livelier in their approach to the concrete problems confronting the units, both shop and street.

While some Party comrades, and especially the new ones who show an eagerness for work, are burdened with work, many comrades escape direct responsibility for unit work. We can say generally that the members of our Party are very active. But if one judges by the response to assignments, then it would appear as if many Party comrades are shirking assignments. This has a very depressing effect upon new Party members, who cannot understand why older members do not accept assignments. What is this due to? It is due first to the fact that the unit bureaus know little or nothing about the personal lives of the comrades, many of whom, because of home relations or health conditions, cannot give many nights to direct Party work. Nor do they know the work these comrades are carrying on in mass organizations. The comrade may belong to a union and really be or profess to be active in the fraction and the union. He may also belong to another mass organization. Frequently it is discovered that he is not active in the fraction of the union nor in the mass organization itself. He uses this, however, as an excuse for not accepting unit assignments.

Overloaded Fractions

We have, on the other hand, comrades in the mass organizations without the knowledge of the Party, helping unnecessarily to increase the size of the fraction in the mass organization. If the Section Committee and particularly the unit bureaus were well informed on the above questions in regard to every member, then explanations could easily be given as to the work of the older members and no new Party member could be discouraged. If the unit bureau had this informa-

tion and checked up in the mass organizations as to the activity of the unit members and as to whether they are needed for active work in the fraction, then it would be possible to withdraw many comrades who belong to mass organizations where they are not needed. For instance, there is a club in New York of 20 members with a fraction of 12 Party members. There are branches of the I. W. O. in which there is supposedly an active fraction of a large number of Party members who are not at all needed for active work in the fraction although, of course, the comrades should belong to the I. W. O.

In other words we need a regularization of the life of the Party members so that each will have his task and no one will be overburdened. This necessitates the development of unit bureaus into functioning bodies, unit bureaus that first of all know thoroughly the forces at their disposal in the unit.

Units Should Help Members

There remain, however, other problems. Thus the Communist International states correctly that the activity of every Party member is under the control and direction of the unit of which he is a member. When and where, outside of shop nuclei—and none too often there—do the units discuss the work of the Party member who may work in a shop or be a member of a union or some other mass organization? When do we discuss his activity and help him improve his work? What do we do to assist the member of the Party who works in a shop where there is no nucleus to build a shop nucleus? The street unit today is indifferent to the work of the Party comrade, outside of the direct work he does for the unit. It feels no responsibility for it. If the unit is not responsible, then what Party organ is? Surely no other organ of the Party can be responsible.

Therefore it is necessary that the unit bureau each week call in one or two comrades, discuss with them their work in the shop or mass organization and bring it up for discussion at the unit meeting. This will not only enliven the life of the unit, but at the same time and especially for the new Party member will begin to embody the discussion of those things which brought the worker into the Party. He will discover that he no longer is a free lance in the Party, that his actions wherever he may be are being directed and aided by the Party, and that he is responsible to the Party unit. It is the lack of this which has driven many a worker out of the Party. He feels that the Party which he has found in the unit is not interested in his work.

Strengthening Agit-Prop Work

It is obvious, therefore, that we face not only an organizational problem but a very serious political problem. Not only must we, therefore, have an Organization department in the section but we must also establish in the sections Agit-Prop Committees functioning side by side and having equal importance with the Organization Departments. We cannot build up the Party merely by taking workers into the Party. We are a Communist Party and must make Communists out of the workers when they join the Party. This cannot be done in an effective manner except through systematic educational work. At the same time the units in the section cannot correctly carry out their agit-prop work among the masses unless their understanding is raised by methodical discussion of the Party program and campaigns. The strengthening, therefore, of the Agit-Prop department in the District, especially for the shop units, and in the sections as well, with the immediate objective of selecting a comrade in every shop and street unit for agit-prop work, link-

ing it up with the organizational work of the Party, will enable us not only to improve our work among the masses, recruit more rapidly, but at the same time reduce the fluctuation, which again is assuming alarming proportions.

Section Agit-Prop Departments

This question must without fail be taken up as the only point of discussion at Section Committee meetings. The Section Bureau should discuss it thoroughly and work out better methods of control. At the same time it must not fail as an immediate task to establish Agit-Prop Departments and to give them every aid for strengthening themselves and improving the work of the section. This will not be realized unless, just as we try to select very good comrades as unit organizers, and recognize the importance of good financial secretaries capable of carrying on their work, so too we begin to understand that agit-prop work and the selection of a capable comrade or one able to be trained as Agit-Prop director are of equal importance.

The last plenum of the Central Committee dealt very concretely with the agit-prop work of the Party in the report of Comrade Bittleman. This report was published in the Communist of February, 1935, and should be studied by every comrade. Applying it concretely to the District and sections, we should within a very short time be able to build up, simultaneously with the Organization Departments, active Agit-Prop Departments, and change the whole life of the Party.

In the above we have not discussed the work of the street unit in the territory, building up mass organizations or penetrating existing organizations. This is an essential part of the unit life, without which the unit is no real unit. It is also essential in stemming fluctuation.