

# Functioning of a Detroit Shop Nucleus

By VERA BUCH

THE nucleus in question, one in a large and important automobile plant, has 25 members, of whom 19 are in good standing.

Within the past six months certain changes have been effected which have greatly improved the functioning of the nucleus. This nucleus was previously in rather poor shape, with few comrades attending the meetings which were dull and unproductive.

The first step in the revivifying of the group was the creation of the Executive—the nucleus bureau. The Executive had made an abortive attempt to exist about a year ago, but had collapsed. It took only a few weeks, however, to elect a new Executive representative of departments of work (Organizer, Industrial Organizer, Women's Work, Agitprop, Negro Work, and Shop Newspaper) and to make it function. The Executive now meets once a month and maps out the program for the two monthly meetings which the nucleus holds,—one business and one educational meeting. The business meeting takes up not merely routine business but discussion of party program as well. The educational meetings take up discussions of more general topics, such as "The Backwardness of the American Working Class, "Work Among Women," etc.

The functioning of the Executive at once brought about an improvement in the conduct of the nucleus meetings. The organizer now comes prepared with an order of business, worked out in digested form by the Bureau. The Executive goes thru all communications, disposing of

many without even bringing them before the nucleus. This eliminates the endless fumbling about with papers, wondering what to do with them, which is inevitable when communications come directly before the nucleus. The meetings arranged by the Executive have a snap and an orderliness which cannot be attained in any other way.

Departments have likewise been stimulated by the Bureau meetings. Heads of departments are called upon to report first to the Bureau and then to the nucleus meeting. They are obliged to function in order to be able to make their report. The industrial organizer, who formerly was an expert in presenting excuses for his non-functioning, for example, has been brought to life, and is now taking up the question of trade union membership. A registration showed that only three comrades of the nucleus were trade union members. Pressure was brought to bear and a few more have joined. Of course, department work in the nucleus is closely linked up with the departments in the District. If the latter are not functioning the nucleus heads find themselves at a loss. On the other hand, a live agitprop or women's work head in the nucleus can stimulate a district department into action.

Long CEC communications, programs or other long documents are assigned by the Bureau to one of its members who prepares a digest of of and is given five or ten minutes of the business meetings to present it for discussion to the nucleus. This is better than reading long letters

which is conducive to weariness and lack of attention.

While this nucleus has improved, much is yet to be done. Attendance is now about 12 (it was formerly 8). Non-attending member must be brought out or dropped. Promptness in starting meetings has not yet been achieved. Daily Worker and literature work are weak. Rarely does the nucleus meeting see literature, (not to speak of the workers in the factory seeing any!). "Daily Worker" work is confined to taking a collection among the comrades now and then, when there is a crisis. This is a serious deficiency. The non-functioning of the section in which this nucleus is located has been a handicap.

The most essential problem of the nucleus is just beginning to be tackled. This is its functioning among the workers of the factory. This is of course a problem for all shop nuclei and not merely for this one. The reorganization of the Party has been accomplished; factory nuclei are established; they have got over their first weakness. Yet the reorganization misses its purpose unless these nuclei actually work within the factory, carry out there the Party program, build there groups of sympathizers around the comrades from which new members can be recruited. (As a matter of fact our street nuclei in most cases are not functioning as street nuclei either.) While attempts have been made here and there in Detroit to reach the factory workers, taking the nuclei all in all, they do not function as factory nuclei. The Ford nuclei are to some extent exceptional to this. At any rate, the nucleus considered here leads an isolated life unknown to

the workers in the plant, without influence, without contact.

This matter has been taken up by the nucleus and the question has been raised: "How can we function as a factory nucleus?" Certain concrete elementary steps are being taken to reach the workers, among them, placing comrades in the club which the company maintains for the workers. The problem is not easy. The factory employs 15,000 workers. Our comrades are scattered through different departments. Half of them speak English with difficulty, some not at all. The company, like all auto firms, enforces a fierce espionage system. Yet we must reach the workers. It is necessary to know the factory better, to know the groups and types of workers, to follow every change of the their conditions, of their mood.

This nucleus, in line with the new policy of the District, has taken over its own factory paper. Formerly one comrade in Detroit wrote all the factory papers (with the exception of the Ford Worker). He visited the nuclei meetings, got a few notes and wrote up the papers. The comrades of this nucleus often did not even see "their" shop paper, did not even know whether it came out or not; did not know how many copies were sold. This is being changed. There is now an editorial committee of three which writes the paper. Two or three additional comrades have been drawn into activity. Still, the paper is not yet vitally linked up with—the life of the workers in the plant. It sells 1000 copies at the most.

The fact that the nucleus has begun to turn its face toward the factory is a big step forward, and with proper guidance from the District Committee will be able to achieve good results in the plants.