

Make the Industrial Units Vital Organizations!

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AFTER MUCH DISCUSSION our last Party convention decided to make a change in the basic structure of organization and to allow the organization of industrial units. This change was made primarily to strengthen our work in the trade unions and to link up the general Party work with the concrete day-to-day work in the trade unions. In discussing the need of industrial units many of the trade union comrades argued: "Why should we spend time canvassing in the localities among people with whom we have no contact? This could be done much better through industrial units among workers in our trade unions where we have already established our prestige."

Against this argument many of us feared that the organization of such units would weaken the general work of the Party and that there would be a tendency of converting the industrial units into trade union fractions, or even progressive groups.

Generally we can say that although the industrial units have improved the work of the Party in many instances they have not entirely fulfilled our expectations. During the first few months of the organization of industrial units the growth was striking. However, most of the units showed a lack of persistence so that in recent periods the increase of the Party membership in the industrial units did not in any way exceed the growth of the street units, and in fact in some instances fell far below.

Industrial units which had the proper leadership and the proper guidance from the section not only served to strengthen our trade union work but also enabled us to bring in the various Party campaigns and to raise the political level both of the Party comrades and the masses among whom they work. However, in many industrial units the work has suffered greatly because the leading comrades who were most persistent in pressing for the organization of industrial units left them to shift for themselves once they were organized. The result was that not only the work of the unit suffered, but also its fraction work. Since the unit was synonymous with the fraction, poor work in the

unit resulted in much poorer work in the trade union. The recent elections have also shown that such units have not learned how effectively to link up the election campaign with the day-to-day problems of the unions and generally to build the Party in the trade unions. This weakness of the industrial unit to some extent accounts for the fact that the Party vote in New York City, although considerably increased, is not by any means in proportion to the great influence we wield among the masses of trade unionists. The same is also true on the question of Party recruiting.

Here are a few examples. In the moving picture industry there are three unions in the field—an A. F. of L. union, an independent union, and a company union. We had very weak fractions working in these unions, disconnected from one another. Very often the small fractions found themselves at dagger heads with one another in the application of the Party line in the unions. When the industrial unit was organized it had a membership of ten comrades. Today the unit has a membership of about thirty. The comrades were able to work out a unified policy in the struggle for the merger of the three unions, which is now on the point of being realized. There is no question that the unit has been an important factor in bringing about this unity. The comrades are issuing a Party bulletin dealing with trade union issues, as well as general Party campaigns. They have participated (although still weakly) in the election campaign, raising funds, organized a rally, etc. Today they have organized a class of moving picture operators in the Workers School involving not only Party comrades but many non-Party workers.

To be sure there are still many weaknesses in this unit. Most of the comrades are new in the Party and in the trade union movement. However, when we take into consideration the fact that the moving picture operators work until late at night and that the unit has to meet at midnight, we can definitely say that the good work done by this unit would have been impossible if the comrades had remained scattered throughout the street units. We can also say that the work done by the unit was possible because there were a number of Party comrades who were conscious of their responsibilities as Party members, were in frequent consultation with the section and helped to build the unit as a basic Party organization.

Another instance I want to cite is the pharmacist unit. This union is under Left-wing leadership. We had a poorly functioning

fraction and here, too, because of the late hours of work, the comrades were not a real factor in the work of the Party. Since the unit has been organized the membership has increased from about 25 to 45. The comrades actively participated in the election campaign, raised \$250 for the campaign and distributed Party literature. They are now developing an excellent solidarity campaign for Spain in which they are involving not only the workers but many of the middle class, professional elements.

In the course of this work many internal difficulties, which threatened the very life of the unit, arose. It was only because the section was alive to the situation and assigned leading comrades to meet with the unit that the internal difficulties were adjusted and the unit is well on the way towards much better work.

As against these units there are far too many industrial units that cannot in the real sense of the word be considered the basic Party organization. Let me cite examples of some of the typically bad units.

Among the first units to be organized on an industrial basis were some of the Brooklyn painters' units. During the first period the units worked very effectively, recruiting many members and bringing the Party campaigns into the unions. However, after the honeymoon of its existence the leading comrades of the union became sluggish in their work and because of certain organizational difficulties in the section little attention was paid to the unit. This good unit which showed such great promise has been reduced to a bad fraction. Here is an example of one unit meeting.

The comrades opened the meeting stating that the section letter did not apply to them. A brief report on the local union was given, in the discussion the comrades brought up some personal grievances which are rarely settled to the satisfaction of anybody, and the meeting was adjourned. The bureau did not meet in advance to consider the section letter, to see which parts of it were applicable to this particular unit. It did not plan its work on the basis of its particular problems. The unit did not make arrangements for discussions on the various issues before the Party. It allowed personal grievances to come up that should have been settled either by the individual comrades or through the union. No wonder the unit ceased growing. The comrades hardly feel that they are an organic part of a revolutionary party. The poor functioning of the unit has weakened our position in the union. Despite the great victory

of the New York painters we were defeated in this local, which today is again in the hands of racketeers.

Another example of a bad unit—the Amalgamated. The comrades of the Amalgamated were among the most ardent supporters of industrial units and in fact were the first to get the consent of the district to organize such units. During the first few weeks the comrades were enthusiastic. They saw the possibility of organizing shop units through the industrial unit. They sold large numbers of Party pamphlets. They developed real Party consciousness. But this enthusiasm did not persist. The comrades busied themselves with the unit and began to neglect the rank-and-file movement and activities within the local. The industrial unit defeated its main purpose, namely, activizing the comrades in the trade unions. It slackened in its activities and became suspended in the air. So that today these comrades who were such strong advocates of industrial units are beginning to raise the question of dissolving the industrial unit and sending the comrades back into their street units.

The only explanation for this situation in the unit is that the comrades, instead of realizing that the work in the unions, the growth of the Party, can only take place through persistent and systematic activity, have a tendency towards looking for schemes to solve their very difficult problems. They used to attribute all their weaknesses in the union to the absence of an industrial unit; now they claim the fault lies altogether with the industrial unit. Evidently there is something fundamentally wrong with our work in the Amalgamated which cannot be solved through organization alone but by a more correct application of our policy to the new situation in the Amalgamated.

How can we explain that in the moving picture operators', the pharmacists', and the furriers' units, the results are different than in the painters and the Amalgamated? The above experiences show that the form of organization alone, although helpful towards improving the Party, does not in itself solve the problems of the inner life of the Party unit.

In addition to the proper form of organization it is necessary for the Party to help build up leadership and give the proper guidance to the unit. This is necessary for all units, but it is especially important for industrial units, as the comrades coming from one trade and absorbed in their trade union work, will show a tendency towards centering the discussions and

the work of the unit on purely trade union problems. Experiences show that if the industrial units are really to help advance the work of the Party, it is necessary in the first place for the leading comrades in the unions, who are familiar with the problems of the union, who understand the general line of the Party, to assume leadership in their units, to serve on the unit bureaus as they formerly did on the leading fraction, to act as unit organizers and generally lead the unit.

Secondly, it is necessary for the section leadership to give particular attention to the industrial units. The problems of the industrial units are very often different from those in the street units. It is necessary from time to time to call meetings of the unit organizers of the industrial units. The section trade union department, organized on the basis of representation from the leading industrial units in the section, familiar with the problems of the section, can be of great help in aiding the industrial units to exchange experiences. In those instances where this has been done, as in Sections 3 and 22, the comrades felt that these meetings have been of great help.

Therefore, in summing up our experiences we can say that the industrial unit is an effective means of increasing the Party influence and Party strength. To eliminate the existing weaknesses and to make the industrial unit more effective it is advisable (1) to organize the work of the unit in such manner that one meeting a month be devoted to trade union problems, (2) to organize the leadership of the unit, bureau and unit organizer, and comrades who have prestige among the workers in the trade should be drawn in so that they can give proper tone to the discussion and develop the comrades in the unit, always keeping in mind that building the Party is also the best means of strengthening the union. Attention must be given by the section leadership to these important tasks. Particular stress should be laid on educational work and recruiting, for which we have the greatest possibility through the industrial units.

Through such means we can hasten the building of the Party, increase our influence in the trade union movement, help to build a mass Labor Party and develop a core of Party leaders in the trade unions who will not only know how to advance the Party trade union line but will know how to use their influence and prestige in the union to advance our Party and the revolutionary movement generally.