

Can a Shop Nucleus Replace a Branch?

(Letter to the Editor)

By L. COOPER.

Comrade M. Abern's article in the magazine section of the DAILY WORKER, what can shop nuclei do? can be divided into two parts: criticism and construction. As much as he is correct in the first part, in the criticism of the branch activities by just as much he is rather wrong in his plans of reconstruction of the party into shop nuclei.

It is true the branches as they are now constructed do not do much actual work. Members do not attend their shop fraction meetings and are inactive in the unions. We have to press upon them to pay more attention to this work.

But the reconstruction of the party into shop nuclei will do more harm to the party than do good.

We have to bear in mind that we live in the most reactionary capitalist country. As soon as our shop nuclei will meet in the factory either at lunch hour or after work, all of them will be fired the very first day. Besides after five or even four and one-half hours of hard work you feel like having your lunch and you go to a lunch room. There you cannot have your meeting; this is clear to everyone of course. After the day of work is over you cannot have any meetings again, as you are tired and rushing home. The tailors and the office workers might get time to meet but the machinists, blacksmiths, laborers, etc., will not find any time to meet, while every member can attend his party branch meeting after supper.

It seems to me that Comrade Abern did not work in a shop lately and he forgot what the conditions are there. He says "they can meet almost any time, since they are always together." But how about the dogs that are watching your step, that your machine should not stop for a second? In the Baldwin Locomotive Works, in the Midvale Steel Co. watchmen are placed in the lavatories so that no one sits too long and does not attend too often. In the smaller places it is still worse.

"They pay their dues at noon lunch to the secretary of the shop nuclei," does not the secretary have to eat, or will the foreman give him an extra one-half hour for lunch?

I just imagine the activity of such nuclei. I cannot see how they can discuss an important party question at the lunch hour, if they have to go to the lunch room and having the "dogs" watching them.

"There is the question of all newspapers or bulletins written in ink or pencil, if need be, and posted in the factory somewhere for the workers in the shop." Comrade Abern must think he is in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, where all this is done openly. Try to paste the most innocent announcement on the wall and you will be fired, not only the one who did it, but the whole nucleus.

We did not reach the state where we can work too much in the open in the factories. Do not forget that union officials are against us, as Communists, as members of T. U. E. L., the capitalist agents watch us closely, and consequently we cannot work as free as we have to.

I agree and insist upon it that the shop nuclei must exist and work hard, but do not agree that it should function as a party branch. Our party activity is very small now but it will be less yet, if we reorganize the party on the shop nuclei basis.

What the party should do is to compell every member to be active in his nucleus otherwise to expell from the party, the same way when the member does not pay his dues.

I would like to ask Comrade Abern how is he going to construct the nuclei of the painters and paper hangers, who might not meet in one place for years. There are two painters in our branch, they are working for the same man and for the last two years did not meet even once either in

the office, or on the job. How will they work in the party?

Now they see each other at the branch meetings once in two weeks and after very week. I fail to see the benefit of the reconstruction of the party in this manner, especially the way Comrade Abern puts it up. However, it does not mean that I will resist such a step of the Workers Party.

EDITOR'S NOTE—We welcome the expression of opinion by our comrades on the question of Shop Nuclei which is to become one of the most important means of building our party into a mass Communist party. We shall gladly publish articles on this question by members of the party provided the matter is treated in a concise and practical manner.

Comrade Cooper seems to be in favor of shop nuclei but he objects to these nuclei becoming the basis of the party organization. In this objection Comrade Cooper is wrong. It is the understanding and intstruction of the Communist International that the shop nucleus must become the basic unit of the party. Why? For two reasons mainly. First, because it is only thru the shop that a real mass foundation can be created for our party. Second, because the only way to make shop nuclei (which Comrade Cooper is in favor of) real, living organs of the party is by giving these nuclei all the functions and all the authority of a basic party unit.

As to the extent to which shop nuclei will be able to function in the open, we don't think we have any illusions about that. Comrade Cooper is perfectly right when he points out the possible persecutions from bosses and foremen against our comrades of the shop nuclei. But what of it? The road to Communism is a road of sacrifice and suffering, but that's no reason for giving up the struggle for Communism. What we should have to do in this case, as in all other cases of persecution by our enemies, is to be careful, practical and persevering. We fight in the open as long and as much as we can, and, when driven to it, continue underground. This is true of shop nuclei in the same sense as it is true of our party as a whole.

The question of how to organize parties, when and how the nuclei should meet, and problems of a similar technical nature will no doubt crop up at every turn of the game as soon as we begin earnestly the building of shop nuclei. But all these minor problems will be taken care of in due time on the basis of the experience of the entire party organization.

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