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# Objective Conditions and Shop Nuclei

by Harry Gannes

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Experience and history proves that the strength of a Communist organization lies in the predominance of the proletarian members within its ranks. There is abundant proof of this. Has not the Communist International time and again rebuked the weakness of the Italian and Bulgarian Communist Parties because of the preponderance of peasant elements? Zinoviev has more than once indicated the advantage that the German Communist Party has in the vast number of proletarians within its ranks, even though that party has been criticized for not developing its shop nuclei activities more rapidly.

## **The Grave Digger of Capitalism.**

But this is no argument against the most intensive campaigns and activities among the peasant masses — in the United States the oppressed tenant and dirt farmers. Comrade John Pepper and others have shown the necessity of the work of the American party in the agrarian sections of the country. In a country that is half industrial and half agrarian in population, facing realities, there is no doubt where the activities of the Communists must be directed. Yet the work among the industrial workers must predominate.

The grave diggers of capitalist society will be the proletariat, the unskilled workers created by the capitalist mode of production. Marx did not quibble about that. It is true that the peasantry and the aristocracy of labor (the skilled workers) might act as the pallbearers and the undertaker, but the most important function belongs to the lowest stratum of exploited workers, the proletariat, those who in the United States work

in the basis industries.

This is nothing new for the Communist movement in the United States, for more than once has the slogan been issued, "To the masses of workers!" But the party has been laboring under handicaps imposed by an antiquated organizational structure that has prevented it from reaching the very section of the working class that must be relied upon as the motive force of revolution. Why? Because of the inherent development of capitalist society, the massing of large numbers of workers in industry, and the disfranchisement of a vast number of these workers. Then, too, these unorganized workers have been forbidden the right and the means to organize in defensive economic organizations, trade and industrial unions.

## **Shop Nuclei Necessary.**

John Edwards, in his article on "Shop Nuclei — The Only Road to a Mass Communist Organization," shows how the present structure of the party is incapable of enlisting the great number of unorganized workers and why the major part of our work reaches those organized into trade unions, for the most part the better skilled workers. †

It would be well to direct our attentions to objective conditions in the United States so far as shop nuclei or organization is concerned. Heretofore, discussion has been on the conditions within the party; a necessary discussion.

The problem of shop nuclei deals mainly with the basic industries and factories. There are, according to the latest census, some 12 million factory workers

†- John Edwards, "Shop Nuclei — The Only Road to Mass Communist Organization," *The Daily Worker Special Magazine Supplement*, March 15, 1924, pg. 6. Available as a downloadable pdf from [www.marxisthistory.org](http://www.marxisthistory.org)

(men and women engaged in manufacture). There are a total of 290,105 manufacturing establishments, divided as follows, outside of 179,676, which employ very few or no workers:

<i>No. of Workers</i>	<i>No. of Factories</i>
6 to 20	56,208
21 to 59	25,379
51 to 100	12,405
101 to 250	10,068
251 to 500	3,599
501 to 1,000	1,749
1,001 to 50,000+	1,021

The number of factories employing over 1,000 workers has nearly doubled since 1914. Except Germany, there is not a capitalist country in the world that has so propitious a background in industry for the formation of shop nuclei as the United States. It is conceded that there are difficulties in the matter of foreign born workers. But that will be taken care of later.

The industrial development of the United States shows that the basic industries have been the magnets for the concentration of workers within particular sections of the country. However, politically, the workers have been divorced from their natural industrial concentration, and as a result some have lost sight of the shop as the basis for agitation.

### **Party Must Be Mobile Force.**

A Communist Party must be a mobile force. It must be quick to act in emergencies; and its campaigns, based on the immediate as well as the ultimate needs of the working class, must be pushed with the speed that is commensurate with the change and crises of the daily struggles. History has developed that type of organization as a result of:

1. The industrial development of the capitalist system and the tendency to employ more and more workers under one roof or in one group, and
2. The political formations assumed by working class power, typified by shop councils (soviets).

It is impossible to conceive of the ultimate success of the Communist program, or even of lasting continued favor with the masses of the workers in the matters of everyday campaigns, without some form of

mass political organization with its basic units in the shop.

A Communist party based on the shop nuclei principle particularly has the advantage, among other things, of the facility with which decisions from the Central Executive Committee are passed down to the basis organizational units which are in constant touch with the masses of workers — limited only by the size of our organization. Decisions and instructions, in this way, are transmitted into effect.

Within the American party we face a big question when discussing shop nuclei — our language federations. But when the shop nuclei question is understood in relation to the subjective conditions of the party and the objective facts of our industrial and political situation, we find that the formation of shop nuclei is the greatest help for the attainment of the ends sought by our federations, in harmony with the Central Executive Committee of the party.

### **Foreign Workers Predominate.**

Let us see how the facts bear out the above statements. Fifty-eight percent of the total number of workers are employed in American industries. Of the workers employed in the basis industries — such as mining, iron and steel, meat packing, and clothing — 60 to 70 percent are foreign born. It can be said unequivocally that the protection of the foreign born workers in the United States is a problem of more than immediate importance for the Communist movement. How can our party best meet this duty?

In the shop nuclei resolution, just adopted, the Communist International rightly states:

Under the reformist policy of the social democratic parties, which endeavored to exert an influence upon the bourgeois government by means of the ballot box, it was natural that attention should be chiefly directed to the organization of voters. The organization, therefore, was based upon electoral divisions and residential areas.

So far as organizational structure is concerned our present party is a whole-cloth inheritance of the Socialist Party. Our only difference is district organizations based on geographic territorial divisions, which is a weak concession to the needed complete reorganization and organization on the shop nuclei basis.

What does our present form of organization

mean to the foreign born comrades within our ranks and those who are not in our organization but who are miserably exploited on the job?

The foreign born section of our population cast 11 percent of the total vote in the last national election, which means 89 percent of them are disfranchised *[sic]*. Any organization based, as the communist International says, on the “organization of the voters” is prevented from carrying on real Communist activities. And the foreign born workers suffer mostly through the ineffectiveness of our present organization structure. Our foreign born comrades, therefore, should be in the front rank in the demand for a sensible, yet rapid, organization and reorganization of the party on the basis outlined by the Communist International — the shop nuclei.

### **Unimpaired Language Groups.**

Would the shop nuclei impair the necessary work among the language groups of workers within the industries? An examination of facts prompts an emphatic “No!” In the needle trades, for example, we find a preponderance of Jewish and Italian workers. The change would in now way interfere with better and more effective Communist language work within the needle industries. We find Poles and Negroes almost exclu-

sively employed in the Chicago stockyards. How will this interfere with the aims of our present federations? Will it not be rather the best means of advancing these Communist aims? The steel industries and the mining camps are but a few other examples that carry out this idea.

The best interests of the foreign born workers can be protected on the job, where they are bitterly exploited and where they completely lack direction and organization. It is for the Communists to give these real proletarians leadership; and that can best be done in a Communist manner by transforming our basic organization unit to the shop.

Summing up: We find that objective conditions in the United States offer monumental arguments for the shop nucleization of our party. How shall that be done? What shall be our first step? That requires a special article. First of all we must recognize our problem, accept and understand the principle. The working out of the details is not such a hard matter. If our comrades persist in offering objections to the shop nuclei organization, no plan will work, for that plan will be directed to comrades who are not yet convinced of the feasibility and the superiority of the type of organization that made the Russian revolution successful and will be more than instrumental in assuring the permanency of the coming German revolution.

***Edited by Tim Davenport.***

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