

Some Problems of Mass Work

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WITH the coming of winter and the passing of the crisis into new and deeper phases, the problems of the work of our Party among the masses become more pressing. It becomes a matter of life and death for us to hasten the tempo of solution of these problems. The resolutions and discussions of the 13th Plenum of our Central Committee furnished the basis for hastening the tempo and solving the most pressing problems of mass work. Every day new and startling events confirm the correctness of our line. But it is necessary to broaden and deepen the line of 13th Plenum in the course of its application to living work.

Our Plenum pointed out the main enemy in *opportunist lack of faith in the masses*, and the consequent growth of bureaucratic and formal methods of work, which cut us off from sympathetic contact with the masses and check the process of recruiting new members. This word of the 13th Plenum was absolutely correct and timely. Life is already showing the necessity and healthy effects of a sharp attack against these abuses. Life is also showing, however, that there may be a vulgarization of the struggle against bureaucratic methods, and a formal "bureaucratic" application even of the struggle against bureaucracy. It is necessary to be keenly on guard against this.

We have hardly begun a serious struggle against bureaucracy yet already we have seen certain examples of an interpretation of the 13th Plenum resolution as constituting a "loosening-up of Party discipline." Some comrades have even said: "How dare you try to ram down my throat a decision by a mere majority vote of a committee, in face of the 13th Plenum resolution against bureaucracy." Such comrades thought the 13th Plenum called a moratorium on decisions, and dissolved our Party into a permanent debating society. Nothing of the sort, comrades!

We shall never surrender ourselves to drowning in a sea of words! Every resolution of the 13th Plenum was designed to *strengthen Party discipline*, and to make our actions among the masses more powerful and decisive than ever before. If formalism and bureaucratic methods can isolate us from the masses, even more quickly can slackness, hesitation, interminable debate without decisions, and failure to carry out decisions with ruthless persistence. Furthermore, slackness and indecision are themselves evidence of a

deep-seated tendency to opportunist bureaucratic methods, differing only in form from the "drill sergeant" type of bureaucracy, but with the same political contents. We must war simultaneously against the "drill sergeant" and the slacker and interminable phrasemonger. We are a Bolshevik Party of action. We must be the steel rod that penetrates the masses, that realizes the latent power of our class.

THE PROBLEM OF FORCES

No Bolshevik can under-estimate the decisive importance of experienced leading cadres in mass work, whether it be in unemployment demonstrations, building the unemployed councils, carrying on a strike, or building the trade unions. Our trained cadres are our most powerful material weapons, without which we would be helpless. They must be the apple of our eye, we must develop them with loving care, we must constantly recruit new forces to their ranks. They are our firm reliance in the heat of struggle, without which the battle cannot be fought. They are the bearers of the Bolshevik principles to the masses, they are the eyes, the nerves, the brain, the spirit of the mass movement.

But our cadres are all these things only on one condition, namely, that they have the closest contact with the masses, draw their force and spirit from the masses, inspire the masses with their firm leadership, and draw from among the masses all the rich latent material of leadership that awaits the stirring power of Bolshevik thought and action. If, on the contrary, any part of our cadres approach the masses with contempt and sets "our leadership" over and against the natural leading capacities residing in the masses; if they see leadership only from "above"; if they rely entirely upon the thin red line of "professional revolutionists" for the multitudinous and constantly increasing tasks of leadership, then we are headed straight for break-down and disaster.

With the rising of hundreds of thousands and millions of workers for struggle, our main task as regards the problem of forces is to draw new leaders from the masses and organize them into new cadres. We must have a hundred times as many leading forces, and this is the one and only way to get them. This is a life-and-death question. It cannot wait. We must at all costs begin to do it now. And we must fight against all tendencies to hinder this process or slow it down.

Every time we face the problem of a strike or other big mass action, the cry is raised: "Give us forces!" Very good. We must give forces, without stint, for every mass struggle. But at the same time we must insistently demand an answer to the question: "How are we using the forces which we have?" If we are using waste-

fully the precious energies of our painfully limited "professional" trained forces, as a substitute for drawing forth from the masses the rich material only waiting to be used, then we are not only squandering uselessly our basic capital, without renewing it, but we are also stunting the growth of all those tender, living nerves of connection with the masses without which our revolutionary organizations cannot live. And if we are working in that way, then the cry, "Give us forces," must be answered with the firm direction: "Change the methods of work of the present forces, first of all, and draw upon the rich forces with which we are surrounded." Cadres which cannot draw their main reinforcements from the masses, still lack one of the most basic factors of Bolshevik training, and it will not do much good to send them into the mass struggle.

ON THE ESTIMATION OF RELATION OF FORCES

In developing any mass struggle, our revolutionary cadres must work out a strategical and tactical plan of action, based upon a careful estimate of the forces ranged on each side of the struggle. The forces to be estimated are the *class* forces and their relationship. Our plans are crystallized in slogans to popularize them among the masses and serve as directives for the struggle. If our estimation of the relation of forces is incorrect, then our plans will fail and our slogans will not mobilize and organize the masses. We must *know* what is going on in the minds of the workers whom we are to lead, we must know the depth and intensity of their fighting moods, we must follow with meticulous care every thought and idea that sweeps through these masses, in order to know what are the immediate class forces on our side which we can swing into the struggle, and what kind of struggle the masses are prepared to carry through to the end. If we have well-trained cadres, with functioning organizations involving the masses, all unified and welded together by a class program of action, then we have the preconditions for a battle from which the workers will emerge stronger than before.

What our forces will be in a particular struggle, depends to a large extent upon the good work of our leading cadres, in rousing the fighting spirit of the workers and crystallizing it around fighting slogans—that is, the degree to which we mobilize the *subjective factor* of working class will to struggle. But there are also other factors, objectively given and independent of our immediate desires and actions, which set the limits within which we must operate with these subjective factors. These objective factors, and tendency of development, taken as a whole, determine the character of the historical moment and of the particular situation of each

partial struggle, thereby predetermining the general line and character of the immediate struggle independently of our desires. We must learn to judge these factors accurately in each struggle.

It needs little argument (and usually none) to convince our comrades in the coal-mining industry that the objective factors at present preclude any plan of armed insurrection for the overthrow of an oppressive government as the solution of their problems at this moment. We would sharply attack anyone who insisted upon such an immediate plan, not because we are in principle opposed to an armed insurrection; on the contrary, precisely because we take the question of armed insurrection very seriously as one of the historically necessary stages of the struggle, we are firmly opposed to any playing with such a slogan, or its premature raising. This phase of the problem of accurate estimation of forces is generally accepted and understood in our Party. But the less obvious examples of the same problem are not so well understood.

It is not out of place to again quote the resolution of the Eleventh Plenum of the E. C. C. I. on this question. Directing us to the necessity of finding concrete forms of the *united front from below*, as the fundamental Communist method of mass work, it said:

"This, simultaneously with the careful evaluation of the general situation calls for an exact estimation of the situation and the relation of forces in the various branches of industry and in each enterprise, the estimation of all the peculiar features and conditions of the various strata of the working class and the application of corresponding concrete methods of struggle: economic strikes, short protest strikes, revolutionary demonstrations, mass political strikes, etc."

Failure to approach the problem in this way will result (and has resulted) in the "calling" of strikes which do not materialize; or efforts to transform an economic strike into a mass political strike without establishing the necessary pre-conditions; and generally in the tendency to substitute our wishes for an examination of the actual situation as the basis of our plans and slogans.

"Our main weakness was, and remains, lagging behind the development of the masses. But this weakness cannot be overcome by trying to jump over the tasks of the moment on the plea of "new perspectives."

THE PROBLEM OF A WEAK PARTY LEADING GIGANTIC MOVEMENTS

We are entering a period of gigantic class actions, with a Party that is still very small and comparatively weak. The contrast between our small physical forces and our exceedingly great tasks, cause some comrades to shrink back and prophecy that the "Party

will break down every time," unless it first builds a strong Party in the industries and districts where it must lead great struggles. This same tendency also minimizes what Party we do have now, and speaks of the Party as "non-existing" in certain places and, therefore, not worthy of consideration because of its small numbers and immature organizational form.

With such an attitude as this we will never solve our problems. This was not the approach of Lenin to the problems of the Russian Bolsheviks, when he returned to Russia from exile in April, 1917, to take up the gigantic task of organizing the victorious revolution by November. Lenin took up his task with a Party comparatively smaller than our own, in relation to the tasks facing it, but he did not moan about an "inevitable breakdown" from lack of forces. He drew his forces from the masses, and built the Party in the course of the struggle. We must follow Lenin's method. Of course our Party is not the Russian Bolshevik Party; neither have we a Lenin. It is necessary for us to build a mass Party according to the principles Lenin taught us.

The wrong attitude on this question was shown in an expression of one comrade at our 13th Plenum, in discussing the problem of building the Party in the Pittsburgh area during the miners' strike. This comrade said:

"We had a weak Party apparatus with which to organize and lead broad united front organizations such as strike and relief committees. The result was that in the first period of the miners' strike the danger arose of the liquidation of the Party, because the leading and active comrades *had to* concentrate their *whole* power upon the formation of those strike and relief committees *without a chance* of mobilizing the *whole party apparatus* for the execution of this task."

Such a formulation of the question does not help to solve the problem. On the contrary, it accepts the *inevitability* of the non-functioning of the Party apparatus in a period of mass struggles, and theoretically justifies such a condition. Upon the basis of this formulation the conclusion has been drawn by some that "the Party will break down every time." Instead of pointing out that in such a situation "the leading and active comrades" *had to concentrate their whole power precisely on mobilizing the whole party apparatus* to carry through the mass work, and to organize the active elements from the masses to do the main part of the work for themselves, the comrade formulates a theory that it is inevitable that "the leading and active comrades" shall be leading and active only in trying to do all this work themselves with their own hands. But this is not leadership, and particularly it is not Bolshevik leadership.

The question of organization, particularly in the shops, cannot be emphasized too strongly. At the same time we must be aware of the danger of organizational fetishism, which can appear in the form of right or left opportunism. Sharper political outlook, greater political sensitiveness, will aid in the elimination of tendencies leading towards organizational opportunism. But when we speak of a sharper political perspective it must be one that has its feet on the ground and ear to the masses. We must be keenly aware of the danger of "floating in the air" and "inflated" perspectives.

In this connection it is worth while to quote the following remarks from comrade Manuilsky's report to the 11th Plenum:

"But this Plenum must declare war on organizational opportunism just as mercilessly as the Communist Parties have frequently carried on war against political opportunism."

Our 13th Plenum spoke sharply against this tendency, and repeated and re-emphasized that portion of a previous resolution of our Political Bureau, of July 5, which said on this question:

"The building of the Party on a mass scale necessitates that a number of misconceptions that prevail with regard to the role of the Party in general and particularly during strikes be clarified. The most important of these misconceptions are:

1. That the Party can be built only after the strike and even then only when the workers win all the demands.
2. That during the strike the members of the Party working in that strike and in the union as organizers and leaders of the strike, cannot and even must not take up simultaneously the task of building the Party.
3. That during the strike the individual leading members of the Party are entirely exempt from working within the Party (nuclei, district committees, etc.)
4. The limitation of the functioning of the Party organizations during the strike to the point of liquidation of the regular functioning of the nuclei, district committees, etc.
5. That the Party must work only through fractions and not come forward as an independent force among the masses of the strikers, and at the same time failure to organize even the fractions.

The above tendencies, expressed sometimes openly but more frequently by a failure to carry out the tasks on the plea of other pressing matters, are in practice a denial of the leading role of the Party, and if adhered to would make impossible not only the building of the Party but the conduct of the strike successfully as well. The role of the Party is particularly important at the present stage of the development of the crisis of the capitalist system with the increasing role of terror and social demagoguery."

We must constantly refer back to our Plenum resolutions, such as this, and refresh the minds of our comrades on our most au-

thoritative decisions. The experiences of the struggle now going on provide us with the most precious lessons for future struggles. We must not, and we shall not, continue to repeat all our old mistakes in every new struggle. It is the task of our Party to insure that these lessons are well-learned, even though the process should be protracted and painful.

ALL OUR PROBLEMS ARE PROBLEMS OF MASS WORK

All the problems of the Party, organizational as well as political, are in reality problems of mass work. And these problems must be solved in life, in the consciousness and actions of all the Party members, and, through them, the non-Party masses.

There is not yet enough participation of the Party membership as a whole in the political solution of our problems. We still too much leave these problems only in the higher committees. It is quite true that it is the special duty of the Central Committee and its Political Bureau to lead the Party in the solution of all problems. But we must not allow that the solutions are merely handed down, ready made and pre-digested, with nothing remaining to be done by the member except to read and accept.

It is the duty of each and every member of the Party to study our problems and our resolutions, and make contributions to their decision. Above all, it is the duty of each member, through the regular Party channels, to check up on the execution of the Party tasks and policies, to see that they are not distorted in practice or neglected and forgotten. Every Party unit and committee from the bottom up should be seething with life and political discussion around precisely such problems as these.

We are now in a period when a small Party must arouse and lead million masses in a struggle for life, and in the process build itself into a powerful Party of the masses, capable of smashing the capitalist system and setting up a workers' government. Our Party cannot measure up to these tasks without taking every question with deadly seriousness, and hammering out the correct Leninist line with precision and ruthlessness.