

Leninist theory in concrete practice. No revolutionary organization can begin to think of itself as the party of the working class until it is actually leading significant struggles of the class.

In America today there are a number of groups which think of themselves as the leader of the working class. Some believe this relationship is developing or has developed on the basis of self-appointment or the most consistent tailing of the weaknesses of the class--sexism, racism or anti-gay bigotry. Others believe the workers automatically follow those with the fiercest rhetoric or the most "ideological purity." (And many feel this purity comes from shrill wars of quotations and counter-quotations, rather than offering

concrete analyses of policies tested in their own practice.) A few groups even argue that practice should not interfere with "theoretical work."

We do not pretend to have a total answer to all the problems of base-building and what lies at the root of every mistake the new communist groups are making. We do feel, however, that many of the errors come from a petty bourgeois contempt for the working class and an objective repudiation of the idea of a mass line, of learning from the people, of the root of all knowledge in social practice in the real world. None of these groups is or appears to have the potential to become the leader of the working class.

WHAT WE MEAN BY

The Mass Line

The mass line has always been a part of Marxism, but it was the Chinese Revolution that made its full importance clear, and it was the insistence of Mao Tsetung that restored the mass line to its central place in Marxism-Leninism.

The mass line is the Marxist theory of knowledge applied to social practice, that is, the scientific method applied to the class struggle; the point of contact between theory and practice and between party and people. It is *not*, as many dogmatists believe, or act as if they believe, simply a way of implementing policies--"formulating them in the abstract from some perfect mathematical theorem and then watering them down until the people understand them. And, if they fail, watering them down again."

Formulating a mass line is a continual struggle to approach genuine transforming knowledge of the world--a process that will not be completed as long as the class struggle continues. (1) It requires first *direct, concrete* experience of mass struggles and how the people involved perceive these struggles. Guesses, second-hand observations and book knowledge are not adequate.

(2) These ideas and experiences are then concentrated by a revolutionary party to draw the general from the particular. In this stage of the process, party leaders use their understanding of previous lessons and of Marxist-Leninist theory, their past experiences of mass struggle, and their understanding of bourgeois ideologies and practices to help decipher and concentrate the genuine lesson from mistaken or half-understood perceptions of the people. (3) Then the concentrated ideas are taken back and tested in a determined fashion on the broadest possible front in further class struggle. Then, of course, the process begins again.

This process of investigation, concentration and test in mass struggle is the source of all genuine knowledge, all correct practice, and ultimately all correct theory. It is the ideological foundation of the communist party. A party which does not understand this, or is incapable of carrying it on because it lacks the base, can have a "correct" line only by accident, and even then there is no way to know it is correct. Such a party is not, or not yet, a communist party.