



Flatbed trucks became moving demonstrations throughout working class areas of Philly. Correct tactics, developed through application of the mass line, were crucial to successfully waging the Battle of the Bicentennial.

## Some Lessons of July 4th

# The Mass Line in Political Struggle

This article was submitted by comrades in Philadelphia, on the basis of discussion of the "Mass Line" articles in *Revolution* and summing up work done around the Rich Off Our Backs—July 4th Coalition Bicentennial demonstration.

The Battle of the Bicentennial, which culminated in the July 4th demonstration in Philadelphia, was rich in experience of applying the *mass line*, especially in political struggle with the bourgeoisie at close quarters.

The ability to wage this political battle lay in the fact that the slogans and the thrust of the demonstration reflected, in a higher and more concentrated form, the growing sentiments of millions of workers and others. The crisis of U.S. capitalism requires increasingly vicious attacks on the working class, to dump the whole burden of the crisis on the backs of the masses of people. At the same time, increasingly intense competition from imperialist rivals abroad, especially the "New Czars" of the Soviet Union, requires the U.S. bourgeoisie to try to rally the proletariat around them, to win its support for their foreign adventures and wars necessary to prop up their tottering empire against these attacks. Both their internal and external needs require that the workers be *politically disarmed*, to accept capitalism as the "natural order of things," that workers be willing to sacrifice for the "common interest" of labor and capital alike, and identify their future with the future of the bourgeoisie.

This was the basis of the bourgeoisie's *political attack* of the Bicentennial. But, unfortunately for the capitalists, the very conditions of deepening crisis and intensified struggle which compel them to launch their political offensive against the workers are the very same conditions that give rise to the increased questioning among the masses of the nature of the system that breeds hardship, misery and war; and the reality that the workers and capitalists have opposite and antagonistic interests constantly asserts itself in a thousand ways. This was the basis for the forces of the working class to apply the mass line in challenging the capitalist Bicentennial offensive.

### Political Struggle

But the Battle of the Bicentennial was not merely a defensive battle, parrying their attacks in the political arena so we could continue to build economic struggles. We are the *political* party of the working class because we recognize it is the political rule of the bourgeoisie that enforces their domination of society—and that the only solution is proletarian revolution, establishing the political rule of the working class. The working class must be armed with this understanding. And to do this we cannot limit ourselves to the fight around wages, working conditions, etc., where workers are mainly fighting today. We have to take on the bourgeoisie in the political arena as well.

But it is not enough to simply conduct propaganda or demonstrate against bourgeois rule. As Mao Tsetung wrote in "On Contradiction," the universality of contradiction resides in the particularity of contradiction. The contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, for example, universal to the period of capitalism, is revealed in the thousands of particular struggles it spawns. It is by taking up these actual struggles that the masses can begin to grasp the fundamental contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. This is true in the political arena, as in the economic.

Like it says in the article "Mass Line Is Key to Lead Masses in Making Revolution" (first in a series on the *mass line*) in the December 15 issue of *Revolution*, "Propaganda, while an extremely important vehicle for the Party to lay out the whole situation and the scientific basis for revolution to the masses, cannot by itself develop revolutionary understanding. For that the masses must have their own experience." Experience, in this case, of actual struggle against the bourgeoisie in the political arena, struggle against actual *political* attacks.

Marx and Engels pointed out in the *Communist Manifesto* that "The bourgeoisie finds itself involved in a constant battle. At first with the aristocracy; later on, with those portions of the bourgeoisie itself, whose interests have become antagonistic to the progress of industry; at all times with the bourgeoisie of other countries. In all these battles it sees itself compelled to appeal to the proletariat, to ask for its help, and thus, to drag it into the political arena." (emphasis added) By "dragging the proletariat into the political arena," by undertaking to whip up a storm of patriotism around the Bicentennial in order to win the masses politically to a program of sacrifice and support for their wars, the bourgeoisie provided the working class and its Party a sharp opportunity: to call into question the direction on which they have set society, and even their entire political rule.

The bourgeoisie's Bicentennial offensive represented an opportunity as well as an attack. But an opportunity is one thing and using it is another. Our plan to join with others in rallying thousands of workers in Philadelphia on July 4th saying "We've Carried the Rich for 200 Years, Let's Get Them Off Our Backs!" cut through the whole thrust of the bourgeoisie's campaign. While they talked about "one nation, united" we prepared to plant the banner of the proletariat to expose their unity celebration as an attack by their class on the working class and masses of people.

What we wanted to do ran straight up against what they wanted to do. The bourgeoisie understood this and were determined that our demonstration would not take place on that day. Into this struggle they threw the organized force of their state—permit denials, court orders, a request for 15,000 troops, Senate hearings, etc. Their press repeated their slanders. They used hidden agents in the communities, the left movement, and so on, to attack us from within. And they used the opportunist coalition's planned march on the same day to try

to isolate us and paint us as "radicals." "The other coalition agreed to march outside Center City;" "the other coalition behaved itself and has a permit." And, of course, the "other coalition" didn't say anything about who rules and what we've got to do about it.

Against this we had the growing anger of the working class and masses at the thousand and one abuses we face everyday. People are fed up with attempts to make them live like animals and are looking for the enemy behind this condition—as we found when we took out the slogan. But our Party is young and inexperienced. The working class movement is at a relatively low level. Given this relative weakness, how could the Party and the working class take on the bourgeoisie in political struggle?

### Advanced Action

The political attack of the bourgeoisie around the Bicentennial brought forward the need for an advanced action. But like it says in the second Mass line article in the March 15 issue of *Revolution*, taking an advanced action "does not mean that a handful of communists and advanced forces should try to take on the enemy all by themselves or to act as 'individual heroes,' substituting their own actions for the struggle of the masses, or initiating struggle that the masses do not yet see the need to take up." In fact, it could not be the action of a handful. We did not have the ability to act in such a way. To reduce the thing to a battle between two "superpowers"—us slugging it out with the bourgeoisie to appeal to the masses as "condescending saviours," could only end in defeat. We had to develop people's understanding of the Bicentennial as a political attack coming from the capitalist class and their state and draw them into the battle. Not us against Philadelphia Mayor Rizzo but our class against theirs.

To do this we had to correctly analyze the real attack coming from the enemy, understand the mood of the masses and apply the mass line. The Party had done this in summing up the need for the demonstration and formulating the slogan "We've Carried the Rich for 200 Years, Let's Get Them Off Our Backs!" in the first place. Now we had to repeat the process to deepen our understanding at each step of the campaign. We found early on that the slogan really spoke to people's aspirations. But people often dug it as a "good idea" without grasping the importance of the demonstration or their role in it. In particular, most people didn't understand from the beginning the Bicentennial as a political attack. We could see this in the early days of the campaign when we tended to take it out as a great time to "do the dog" in Philadelphia—a chance to bring our forces together to demonstrate against the capitalists and "build our movement"—instead of an actual struggle against an actual political attack. When we did this we provided no basis for the masses to take it up, and were, in fact, conducting it like "superpower contention." We had to find the ways to bring out the Bicentennial as a political attack and make this real. We had to hit at the thousands of abuses people face—to get at the source: bourgeois political rule. And through this, help people see the Bicentennial as an attempt to shore all that up and come up with the bourgeoisie's *political* answers—"national unity, national chauvinism and the spirit of sacrifice"—brought to you by the same people who bring you war, unemployment, discrimination, exploitation and city cutbacks!

### Correct Tactics Bring Out Political Line

By correctly analyzing the nature of the attack and the mood of the masses and applying the mass line we were able to develop tactics to make the overall political line come alive, to make it understandable to broader sections of the masses and enable them to act.

The Tent City of the Unemployed was one such tactic. The very idea of thousands of unemployed workers parking themselves on the doorstep of the bourgeoisie's celebration of the "land of opportunity" and asking for jobs brought to life the whole question of unemployment. Every attempt to prevent us setting it up only raised the question more sharply and provided more opportunities to expose the nature of capitalism. The four days of activities leading up to July 4th—demonstrations at an unemployment office, a city hospital scheduled to be shut down, etc.—served the same purpose.

In Philadelphia we printed a poster to put on abandoned houses: "1/3 of construction workers unemployed, 50,000 abandoned houses, 50,000 families needing homes. This House: Another Bicentennial Monument to 200 Years of Rule by the Rich"—another way to brand the ideas the bourgeoisie was selling with the mark of their class.

At the same time we had to guard against the right error of reducing the demonstration to simply a protest against particular abuses of the system thereby cutting the political heart out of the slogan "We've Carried the Rich for 200 Years, Let's Get Them Off Our Backs!"

In the beginning the City simply denied our permit requests and ignored the demonstration, hoping to minimize its effect. But taking it out broadly to the masses, making it a broad social question and winning support



# Mass Line...

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for it, forced them out from behind this wall of silence. Growing support in Philadelphia and evidence of organizing going on around the country made it clear that thousands of workers were preparing to go up against their sham national unity on the Fourth. The last straw was the billboard we put up three blocks from City Hall, announcing the demo and calling on people to gather at City Hall at 10 AM, July 4. From that point on the bourgeoisie spared no effort to smash our demonstration. Only by applying the mass line daily, to each new attack, were we able to mobilize the broader and broader numbers of masses we needed to withstand their assault.

Like it says in the second Mass Line article, the mass line "applies *within* each battle—each of the thousands of skirmishes as well as major encounters. If at any point during the development of the struggle, we depart from these principles, fail to deepen our application of the mass line in any respect, including the aspect of determining the correct forms of struggle, we are bound to make mistakes, and the struggle is bound to be set back." At the same time these attacks provided fresh opportunities to unmask the political attack behind the Bicentennial celebration. The contradiction between their theme of national unity and our class interests revealed itself anew in each particular attack they threw at us.

The attempt to call out 15,000 troops and brand us as "terrorists," for example, was a serious attack, but it also called forth people's outrage and raised new opportunities to expose the overall political attack they were launching. To do this successfully, however, we had to make a correct analysis of the attack, the situation and the mood of the masses.

When the troop request hit the papers we already had a number of advanced forces who had come forward around our work in taking the demonstration out to plants, unemployment offices, shopping districts, car caravans and slide showings in people's homes. They didn't believe that the Rich Off Our Backs Coalition was looking for a physical confrontation on the Fourth. And they were angry as hell. Off of this there was some initial tendency to strike a bold stance: "We'll be there no matter what."

## Advanced, Intermediate and Backward

But, as the second Mass Line article pointed out, "Whether or not a particular advanced action should be taken depends on whether or not it will accomplish the goals summarized by Mao Tsetung," which are that: "The masses in any given place are generally composed of three parts, the relatively active, the intermediate and the relatively backward. The leaders must therefore be skilled in uniting the small number of active elements around the leadership and must rely on them to raise the level of the intermediate elements and to win over the backward elements."

If we weren't just going to rally a handful of the advanced around the Party and wage "superpower contention," we had to arm the advanced to win over the intermediate. It wasn't enough to know the mood of the advanced. We had to apply the mass line on the troop request much more deeply to the masses.

When we did this we found that the response of the intermediate was two-sided. People still united with the slogan and were outraged at the troop request and denial of permits. But in the absence of any clear idea about who "was behind this thing" they had real questions about whether the Coalition was looking to manipulate people into a confrontation with the police and the official celebration. Even more they feared that Mayor Rizzo would provoke something whether we wanted it or not.

We correctly analyzed that this was the real aim of the troop request. Not merely an attempt to physically prevent our demonstration, but a political attack to isolate us from the masses by branding us as a bunch of terrorists and misfits. They had to proceed this way because the situation around the Bicentennial didn't offer the bourgeoisie complete freedom to smash us. They initiated their campaign in the first place because they needed to win the support of the people. They couldn't smash the forces of the working class on their day of "freedom, justice and unity" without exposing

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Only by applying the mass line was it possible to wage the political struggle against the bourgeoisie that culminated in the July 4th demonstration.

the real basis of this "celebration." They had to first prepare public opinion, try to separate us off from the working class: "These aren't workers, they're radicals. They have nothing to offer the working class."

We had to take up the attempt to brand us as terrorists in the same way we took up the campaign as a whole—as part of an actual class struggle, as part of the political attack they were waging on our class around the Bicentennial. We couldn't make the main thrust of our response, "this is unfair, we're being repressed," without falling into the trap of isolating ourselves from the masses. The tactics we developed to fight the toe-to-toe battle had to express the overall political line of the campaign and make it real to people.

The fight for the Workers' History Pavilion for example, offered lots of opportunity to do this. The Pavilion united with large numbers of honest forces who were drawn to the bourgeois Bicentennial by the historic nature of the occasion. At the same time it raised the question of the class nature of this history and the real history of this country, putting the bourgeoisie on the defensive. To let us erect the Pavilion with hundreds or thousands of people coming through everyday would have made it more difficult for them to isolate us and focussed attention on the different stand on the Bicentennial of the working class. On the other hand, to suppress it as they did helped bring home to people in a very sharp way that the real question wasn't terrorism or disruption but a political battle between two different lines representing two different class forces.

By scheduling it for several weeks before July 1-4, we were able to force much of the fight over permits to take place around the Pavilion—the most favorable grounds for neutralizing the "terrorist" question and putting the burden of being disrupters on them. In doing this we had to apply another lesson of the second Mass Line article: that this "requires repeated experience on the part of the masses of workers and their Party, and the constant summation of that experience by the Party to forge and illuminate the revolutionary road." To that it must be added that not only repeated experience, but *comparison* is required for the masses to gain this understanding, comparison—in the course of the actual struggle—of the lines, policies, tactics, etc., of the two fundamentally opposed forces, the proletariat, represented by its Party, and the bourgeoisie, with all its various representatives, in their various forms, open and concealed."

In the fight for the Pavilion we applied for permits and took it to Federal court when they were denied. By taking the battle out to the masses everyday and explaining the nature of the struggle we were able to win the support of thousands of people. This restricted the freedom of the bourgeoisie and forced the judge to order we be given a site for both the Pavilion and demonstration, although outside of Center City. We attacked their attempt to drive the working class exhibit out of the spotlight, but accepted a site in Norris Square Park for the Pavilion, demonstrating our seriousness in putting the thing on and not just trying to disrupt.

When the bourgeoisie put new conditions on us (building permits which couldn't be approved until after July 4th, and \$1 million insurance) we tried to meet these too, while we exposed these outrages to the masses. We put on mini-exhibits with 3'x5' panels, giving people the opportunity to compare what was said about us with what we were doing. We conducted press conferences, held street corner rallies and car caravans and put out almost daily leaflets. Each new attack was taken

out to the masses as a part of the larger political attack on the working class. And by doing this on the basis of a correct analysis of the attack and the mood of the masses we were able to "create favorable new conditions" for struggle. To the point that when we finally tried to build the Pavilion without a permit and the police confiscated our supplies, the mass response was not that we were disrupting but spontaneous outrage: "They even stole your lumber!"—and a growing understanding of the battle.

This same process of providing the masses with repeated experience and comparison was followed throughout the toe-to-toe battle. Around the question of unemployment and the Tent City, around the demonstration itself, and around each new attack—Senate hearings, press slanders, attempts to link us with the opportunist coalition and all their flakey contingents and demands (homosexuality, pacifism, etc.)—around each of these we found dozens of ways to take the questions to the masses and release their initiative by exposing the basis for each attack in the overall political attack of the bourgeoisie around the 4th.

## Isolating Enemy Agents at Close Quarters

The open attacks by the bourgeoisie were followed by others where they fired from concealment. Like it says in the second Mass Line article, "It is bound to happen that in any decisive struggle agents of the bourgeoisie surface and work to wreck the struggle from within. It does not matter whether such people are directly in the pay of the bourgeoisie or not...but the key thing is that they have the same *class outlook* as the bourgeoisie and on this basis represent and actively promote their interests within the struggle."

Once again the key was to go up against these attacks as part of the overall battle against the political attack around the Bicentennial. Early in the battle, for example, Muhammad Kenyatta—formerly a Black radical, now either a police agent or a good imitation—testified in court that we were planning violence, that we had been a part of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP)-led opportunist demonstration and had split because they didn't want violence, and a whole assortment of other lies.

To have responded by just calling him a liar and so forth would have made the fight one between him and us. At best we win some sympathy, at worst we come off like a bunch of crybabies.

What we had to do was bring out whose interest was served by his attack—how it fit into the overall attack on the working class. That in fact, it served our enemies like other positions he had fought for: more police in the Black community, higher taxes, etc.

The problem of dealing with enemy agents at close quarters was raised in even sharper form when the bourgeoisie unveiled the second half of their strategy. Unable to ban the march and rally altogether, they forced it out of Center City into several mainly Black and Puerto Rican communities. Then, a week before July 1, they paraded out an assortment of political hacks and poverty pimps posing as community leaders. Unable to attack the political content of the demonstration which clearly united with the aspirations of people in those communities, they attacked the demonstrators as "white outsiders" bringing in trouble and demanded the permits be revoked.

Each tried to put himself forward and make it a question of them as individual leaders against the Rich Off Our Backs outsiders: "What have these people done for us? I gave the community a child care center," for example. Against this cheap opportunism we had to speak to people's broadest class interest. The fight for Norris Square Park, the site of the demonstration, was a key point in the Battle of the Bicentennial. We sent special Spanish-speaking teams out in the neighborhood to win people to the political struggle against the bourgeoisie's political offensive. We put out leaflets almost daily. We held a concert in the park and a mini-exhibit of the Pavilion. And at each point we drew out how the demonstration was in their interest as part of the working class.

And so it went throughout the whole Battle of the Bicentennial, choosing targets for demonstrations and planning actions on the basis of applying the mass line—actions which would speak to sentiments and experience of the masses and focus it against the bourgeoisie. By so doing, the advanced forces were able to defeat the attempts by the ruling class to portray the Rich Off Our Backs—July 4th Coalition as something alien to the interests of the working class, and unite greater and greater numbers of people around the slogans and demands of the demonstration.

Despite the objective fact that the working class movement in this country is at a relatively low level, the working class' counteroffensive during the Bicentennial succeeded in reaching hundreds of thousands of people and mobilized many thousands to take action, culminating in the demonstration in Philly.

During this whole campaign our understanding of the mass line was greatly deepened. By making a Marxist analysis of the situation, correctly understanding the nature of the bourgeoisie's political attack and the mood of the masses, and by applying the mass line, we were able to lead the masses in carrying through an important political battle and winning important victories. ■