

Mass Line Is Key to Methods of Leading Struggle

Recently (Dec. 15, 1975) an article in *Revolution* went into the basic principles underlying the mass line and its application to developing the revolutionary movement of the working class. This article stressed that, on the one hand the masses of workers must learn through their own experience—and not just one or a few, but many, repeated experiences—the laws governing the actual development of the struggle; and that, on the other hand the proletariat—through its Party—must also wage repeated struggle with the bourgeoisie in the ideological sphere “over how to sum up the struggle, what lessons to draw from each battle and what road to take in order to change with the situation.”

In light of all this, that article laid special emphasis for the Party to “pay special attention to uniting with and raising the level of advanced workers in the science of revolution including the application of the mass line...not apart from, but in the course of, actually leading the struggle of the broad masses.”

Unleashing Masses' Initiative

Closely linked to these crucial principles of the mass line is the question of methods—*how* to develop mass struggle, unleash the initiative of the masses in struggle, to raise their consciousness in the course of it and train the advanced who come forward in struggle as communists.

Mao Tsetung spoke to the same problem nearly 30 years after the founding of the Communist Party of China (and shortly before the capture of nationwide power by the Chinese people under the leadership of the Communist Party): “For over twenty years our Party has carried on mass work every day, and for the past dozen years it has talked about the mass line every day. We have always maintained that the revolution must rely on the masses of the people, on everybody's taking a hand, and have opposed relying merely on a few persons issuing orders. The mass line, however, is still not being thoroughly carried out in the work of some comrades; they still rely solely on a handful of people working in solitude. One reason is that, whatever they do, they are always reluctant to explain it to the people they lead and that they do not understand why or how to give play to the initiative and creative energy of those they lead.

“Subjectively they too want everyone to take a hand in the work, but they do not let other people know what is to be done or how to do it. That being the case, how can everyone be expected to get moving and how can anything be done well? To solve this problem the basic thing is, of course, to carry out ideological education on the mass line, but at the same time we must teach these comrades many concrete methods of work.”

Explaining Political Line

This problem—of failing to explain, even to the advanced workers, lines, policies, actions, etc. that the Party has taken up—this is a real problem in developing the struggle in this country today, a basic question of method for the Party, as the vanguard of the working class. Failing to explain what is to be done does not mean that people are not told about this or that event, or are not asked—even urged—to take part. The problem is that the *line* on which the action, policy, etc. is based, is not gone into, or gone into only in a shallow way.

What is this particular action, policy, etc. meant to achieve? Why is it correct and necessary and timely to take this up now? How does it relate to the fight that workers are already waging or already see the need to wage? How is the line on which an action is based a concentration of the experience and ideas of the masses, which will expose more sharply the face of the class enemy and deepen their understanding of the nature of the fight against this enemy? Who are the allies in this fight? How will a policy help the masses to fight in a more conscious and determined way for their own interests? These are the kind of questions that must be gone into, in discussing and explaining policies and actions taken up by the Party. Failing to go deeply into this, how can it be expected that the initiative of the masses, especially the advanced workers, will be unleashed?

Often related to this error is the tendency to tail the masses, or as the previous article on the mass line put it, to simply “mirror” their present level of consciousness and give back to them what they already understand. Along with that there is the question that, as Mao Tsetung summarized it, “Our comrades must

not assume that the masses have no understanding of what they themselves do not yet understand. It often happens that the masses outstrip us and are eager to advance a step when our comrades are still tailing behind certain backward elements, for instead of acting as leaders of the masses such comrades reflect the views of these backward elements and, moreover, mistake them for those of the broad masses.”

Is this not a problem that has often arisen in the work of our Party already? Are there not many cases when the masses looked to the advanced forces, including Party members, to kick off and lead them in struggle, only to be disappointed? Have we not been told on more than one occasion such things as “we thought you were going to lead a walkout, how come you didn't?”...or found ourselves simply talking in a general way about attacks when the masses wanted to get together to fight concrete abuses and outrages slapping us in the face?

Determining Correct Forms of Struggle

This, in turn, is linked to the questions of what are the correct methods for building struggle, what are the correct forms to build it—or, more exactly, how to *determine* the correct forms. This, too, is a question of applying the mass line. It often happens that the masses go into struggle, or come to the advanced forces looking for leadership to go into action—and have creative ideas on how to do it. They have had rich experience in fighting the enemy and with different forms of developing this struggle.

The role of communists, once again, in relation to this is to apply the mass line, to concentrate what is correct in their ideas about how to fight and go into this deeply, especially with the advanced workers, and unite with them to organize the broadest number of people in active struggle. And, as this struggle develops, to continually apply the science of Marxism-Leninism to sum it up and give back to the masses the main lessons of the struggle.

In carrying this out it is especially important to guard against the tendency to substitute subjective thinking, or pre-conceived notions about how to build the struggle, for concrete analysis of the actual conditions of the struggle and application of the mass line to concentrate the experience and ideas of the masses. Otherwise the advanced forces can quickly become isolated from the broad masses, even in cases where the masses have initially sought out the advanced forces looking for leadership or have rallied behind a call issued by the advanced forces, because—initially at least—it did reflect and concentrate their own interests and showed the way forward in the fight.

The masses have had a lot of experience that teaches them that the class enemy has real teeth, that it will hit back at struggles launched against it and that it

will pay special attention to isolating—either by direct attack or through attempts at buying off—those who come forward as leaders of the struggle. The Party must learn, and must train the advanced workers—while learning from them—the methods for combatting this.

Investigation and discussion must be carried out broadly to develop the forms of struggle that enable the masses to pit their *strength* against the enemy. In this question the masses also have a wealth of experience and special attention must be paid to learning from it and applying Marxism-Leninism to sum it up, to concentrate what is correct in it, what corresponds to and will lead to the development of the struggle in a forward direction, toward the final goal of proletarian revolution. It must always be kept in mind, as the previous mass line article pointed out that “Between here and there [communism] is a long, complicated and bitter struggle—a struggle made up of thousands of battles, of skirmishes leading to major encounters from one stage to another.”

“And at each stage the Party must deepen its ties with the masses and its grasp of Marxism-Leninism, and on this basis strengthen its application of the mass line. It must do so to fulfill its objectives and tasks as the Party of the working class and enable the working class to advance to the greatest degree possible through each battle.”

Advancing Through Each Battle

This 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. Experience has already been accumulated in this regard and should be summed up.

There are many cases where initially the struggle was developing in a big way, more and more people were coming forward, taking initiative, grasping matters in their own hands, giving active expression in battle to their deep hatred for the class enemy, but at a certain point the leading forces substituted their own “good idea” for a scientific application of the mass line in determining the next step—and what was the result?

The result was inevitably that the momentum built up was lost—at least temporarily—the initiative of the masses was dampened, the hand of the enemy was strengthened and the advanced forces became isolated. Where yesterday hundreds, sometimes even thousands, were in motion, now only a small number remain active. Where before the masses were gaining in their

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Mass Line...

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consciousness and sense of organization, now they become confused, demoralized and divided.

Of course, there will be ebbs and flows in the struggle due to objective conditions and the relative strength of class forces, and we cannot avoid altogether making mistakes in the struggle, because we—the Party together with the class as a whole—must learn how to wage this class warfare in the course of waging it. But the more thoroughly and all-sidedly we apply the mass line at each step, the more we discover and deepen our grasp of the laws governing the struggle through the study of Marxism-Leninism, and return concentrated, correct lines, policies, tactics, etc., to the masses, the more we can learn to avoid mistakes and to correct them more quickly when they are made.

Isolating Enemy Agents at Close Quarters

Another lesson that must be summed up is that the class enemy does not only oppose the struggle in one form, nor does it have only one face. The enemy not only uses every means to openly oppose the struggle but tries by every way it can to sidetrack and sabotage it. 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—though in many cases they are, and where this can be clearly demonstrated it is important to expose it—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.

Therefore the Party, representing the outlook and interests of the working class, must be good at not only formulating general policies for a given struggle, but for developing at each decisive point the correct tactics, that indicate the next step forward, based on correctly concentrating the real needs and interests of the broad masses. Again, Mao Tsetung has summed up a very important lesson in this regard: "In a situation when the class struggle grows increasingly acute and is waged at close quarters, the proletariat has to depend for its victory entirely on the correct and firm tactics of struggle of its own party."

Sometimes this means entering into some form of compromise or agreement with opportunists—who claim to stand with the working class but actually represent the capitalist class—and at other times it may mean refusing to enter into any such compromise or agreement. This depends on concretely and all-sidedly analyzing the actual situation, what the particular tactics of the enemy—including enemy agents within the ranks of the masses—are, how exposed they are, what the level of understanding of the masses is, etc.

But, at all times, as the *Programme* of our Party states, in referring to the policy of jamming the union officials—which has broad importance for all our work—"To carry out this policy, the rank and file workers must at all times fight to keep the initiative in their own hands and build the struggle in their own class interests, never relying on the union leadership to carry the struggle—even those who can be won to stand with the working class—or allowing them to set the terms and limits of the struggle, reducing the rank and file movement to a 'pressure group.'" And the Party must lead the masses, the rank and file, in this, and must grasp that this is a process that requires repeated experience and comparison.

To sum up this point, the exposure and isolation of opportunist, enemy agents within the ranks of the masses must be done on the basis of applying the mass line to constantly develop and deepen not only correct general policies but concrete tactics to advance the struggle according to the interests of the masses and step by step toward the aim of proletarian revolution, educating the masses as to the nature of the enemy—open and disguised—and the long-term aim of the struggle, in the course of the actual battles. And, at the same time, the Party must constantly arm ever broader masses with a scientific understanding of the role of opportunists, of their *class nature*, and within that pay special attention to training the advanced who come forward as revolutionary leaders, so that they are increasingly armed with the science of the working class.

Advanced Actions

All that has been said, emphasizing the importance of uniting with and constantly winning over and deepening ties with ever broader numbers in struggle, does not mean that the advanced forces, led by the Party, should not take advanced actions. On the contrary, communists and advanced workers must play a vanguard role in the practical as well as the theoretical sphere. In other words, when it corresponds to the needs and desires of the masses, the advanced forces

must be bold in taking action, action that will bring the rest of the masses into motion themselves, and must not wait until absolutely everyone is willing to "start things." Again, a principle summed up by Mao Tsetung is very important here: "Communists should create favorable new situations through struggle."

This, of course, 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. But simply because an action of the advanced forces may create controversy and struggle about whether it's right or wrong, should be supported or opposed—this does not in itself make the action incorrect. In fact, in many cases just such controversy and struggle is what is needed and is a very good thing, not a bad thing.

Advanced, Intermediate and Backward

We must never forget, once again learning from Mao Tsetung, 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."

Whether or not a particular advanced action should be taken depends on whether or not it will accomplish the above goals summarized by Mao Tsetung. In short, it is absolutely correct, and necessary, for the advanced forces to initiate bold, determined action, when in fact it will *galvanize* broad numbers in struggle, will act as a spark to set them in motion and give play to their own initiative in fighting the hated enemy. There are, both in the past and more recent history of the workers' movement, many positive examples of this kind, as well as negative ones where the communists deviated from the mass line, and we must go deeper into these by applying Marxism-Leninism to learn more from them.

Repeated Experience and Comparison

To summarize the main points in this and the previous article on the mass line, a point from the previous article is central: "as also stressed before, the experience of the masses is governed by the internal contradictions of capitalism and the laws of development of nature and society. The understanding of the masses of the need to overthrow capitalism grows together with the sharpening of the contradictions of capitalism and the development toward a revolutionary situation."

And that article further stressed that, in order to become convinced of the necessity and inevitability of socialist revolution and to learn the means for making that revolution "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.

It is through this repeated experience and comparison—and the leadership of the Party in both the practical and theoretical spheres as summarized earlier—that the masses will step by step and more and more deeply grasp and embrace the outlook and the lines and policies representing their own highest interests, the interests of the only revolutionary class in modern society, the working class, representing the majority and the future, the emancipation of mankind.

Question of Revolution Comes to Fore

Socialist revolution, the seizure of state power by the working class and its transformation of all of society to abolish classes is inevitable. When we say this we do not mean it is automatic—that it will happen through a mere "collapse" of capitalism, or that the masses, without conscious leadership will simply "grope" their way to communism.

To say this revolution is inevitable means that the development of society demands it, that capitalism stands as the direct barrier to progress for mankind and must be removed, and that the evils and ulcers caused by capitalism cannot be removed, except through socialist revolution. It means that therefore, capitalism will inevitably end up in crisis, will continually produce massive suffering and waste and destruction, until it is overthrown and eliminated.

It means that, even where the capitalist class is able, temporarily to resolve such a crisis its way and prolong its rule, to inflict momentary setbacks and defeats on the working class, it cannot escape the laws of its own system. It will yet again find itself faced with resistance and a tide rising toward revolu-

tion, until this revolution is finally achieved and carried through completely. It means that, until this occurs, the question of revolution, the need for revolution to do away with capitalism will continually assert itself, despite anyone's will, or any actions of the capitalists.

It is the role of the Party of the working class to enable the working class to build its struggle against the capitalist class as powerfully as possible at each stage and to ever more consciously build it toward the aim of revolution. The mass line and the concrete methods of developing the struggle that flow from it are mighty weapons that the Party can and must wield on behalf of the working class in this great cause. ■

Rubber...

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sealed and delivered, Akron's Local 5 met and voted to demand that the contract be rejected and negotiations reopened.

The contract struggle of 1973 stands as another example that the bosses can't just push rubber workers around. There is a proud history of resistance to these kinds of attacks, dating from the famous 1936 sitdown strike at Goodyear in Akron, the first major sitdown in the U.S., up to the present day. This struggle and the experience gained from it has laid a tremendous basis for resistance to the companies' increasing attacks.

Top Officials Under Fire

One of the things many workers have learned, especially in 1973, was that the International union leadership is in partnership with the companies, doing all it can to shackle the struggle. They are sure to attempt further sellouts this time, too. But there has been a growing ferment against the International leadership.

President Bommarito, for example, was voted down in a bid for election as a voting delegate from his home local to the 1975 URW convention (although he eventually pulled some strings and presided over the meeting, by virtue of his union office, and was reelected President). This struggle against the International traitors includes even some leaders of the local unions. This ferment within the union presents the rank and file with a good opportunity to advance its struggle. For example, even if the national agreement gets sold out, the possibility exists for local strikes or other struggles at the local level taking place.

But there are some who would play on the fact that the International union sells out to try to spread divisions among rubber workers and to further their own careers. The leaders of the International Society of Skilled Trades (ISST) are one such group of opportunists. They tell the skilled rubber workers that the URW International leadership is selling them out, which it is, in an attempt to pull skilled workers out of the union and play skilled workers off against unskilled workers. But the fact is that splitting the union would only hurt all rubber workers and aid the companies in their attacks.

The upcoming contract provides an opportunity for the rank and file to take the scattered and uncoordinated struggle and ferment among all rubber workers and build it into a more unified, powerful struggle directed both at the rubber companies and the URW International leadership. By beginning to build-up some communication and links between the different struggles that break out around the country, rubber workers will be better able to seize the initiative in the struggle and begin to break the stranglehold the International leadership, in cooperation with the companies, has on the rank and file. In doing this rubber workers have a chance to win some important battles, throw some fat on the fires brewing in the auto, electrical, construction, garment and other industries, and strengthen their own ranks for future battles. ■

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