

Through Concentration to a Mass Proletarian Party

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IT is only with a full understanding of the Open Letter, which characterizes with thoroughgoing critical analysis and places with full clarity the central tasks before us, that we shall be able to solve successfully the fundamental organizational problems that confront us.

There is no doubt that the Open Letter is a document of the utmost importance, the line of which, *consciously applied into practice*, will really enable the Party to make the necessary turn.

Those comrades, and there are such, who still claim that the Open Letter does not contain anything new, manifest complete confusion, and are in the category of those elements who will not help to carry out the Open Letter, but on the contrary will become a hindrance with which the Party will have to deal very sharply.

Of course, the problem of building a *mass proletarian Party*, the central point of the Open Letter, and the *problem of concentration* rising as a natural consequence, are not new. What is really new, however, is that this fundamental political and organizational problem of the Bolshevik Party has remained with us merely a theory echoed on occasion as a magic formula for solving all problems. What is new in the Open Letter is, first, that it is a document in which the theory, the perspectives, are combined with the organizational measures to be taken in solving the tasks set; second, that by its clarity, sharpness and conciseness, it raises before the Party the central task to be solved. Another important feature of the Open Letter, and in some respects this is also new in our Party, is the simplicity and directness with which the immediate tasks are connected with the perspective in the light of the Leninist theory of the mass proletarian Party, in the light of the theory of proletarian hegemony in the revolutionary struggle. It is the grasp of this theory that brings to the consciousness of the Party the urgent need for concentration, that spurs the entire Party—composed of so many new elements—to mass activity.

What is the fundamental problem emphasized in the Open Letter? The problem of building a *mass proletarian Party*. In this very conception, in these three words, is contained the funda-

mental political and organizational task before us; the necessity of building a mass Party, which is the problem of quantity, and the necessity of developing its proletarian character and composition, the other phase of the problem, namely, that of quality.

If we analyze the composition of the Party as it stands today, we immediately see that our Party is not yet a mass Party, and though it is proletarian in character and composition, we cannot say that the proletarian elements from the basic industries are predominant.

If this question is clear, then we must also understand the problem of concentration as the means through which to build a mass proletarian Party. Understanding the "why" will teach us the "how".

It is through concentration, through throwing the whole weight of the Party into shop work, that the Party will win over the best elements among the workers in the industries, factories, mills and mines, that the Party will succeed in establishing shop nuclei and thereby link itself with large masses of the American proletariat at the points of production.

As it now stands our shop nuclei can be counted on our fingers. This, by the way, explains our weakness at this moment in taking the lead over the numerous struggles going on against the Recovery Act, especially in the basic industries. This also explains our weakness in bringing forward the Party before the large masses in the basic industries. It explains our bringing the Party forward as an outsider instead of an inside organizing and fighting force.

At this point, for the better understanding of the main problem which confronts us, it is necessary for a moment to take into consideration our final aim, the overthrow of the capitalist system and the establishment of a workers' and farmers' government, the dictatorship of the proletariat as a transitional period for the building of the classless society.

There is the proletariat, the class that is composed of the productive forces of the capitalist society, product of the capitalist system, upon which has fallen the historic mission of overthrowing capitalism. And it is the Communist Party, composed of the most class-conscious elements of the proletariat, rich with the experiences of the revolutionary movement, and armed with the Marxist-Leninist theory, that has the mission of raising the consciousness of the proletariat to its hegemonic role in the revolutionary struggle and of leading the working class towards its final goal.

The Party will be able to accomplish this task by leading the daily struggles of the workers, by politicizing these struggles, by establishing itself as the only leader of the working class in its

struggle for total emancipation from capitalist exploitation. This explains the reason *why* we must build a mass proletarian Party.

The question now is how to accomplish it in practice, how to establish the Party as the only leader of the working class, how to win over the large masses of workers under the influence of the Party, how to organize them, how to organize the agrarian workers side by side with the industrial workers, how to win over as allies the broad masses of the poor farmers, and how to neutralize the petty-bourgeois elements of the city and countryside.

Such tremendous tasks cannot be accomplished at once. The first prerequisite is the rooting of the Party in hundreds of factories, mills and mines—in the basic industries where the masses are concentrated—in daily conflict with the system that is exploiting their collective work. It is in the places of work that the daily struggles are awakening the class-consciousness of the masses. It is here that we find fertile soil to draw the most conscious of them into the ranks of the Party. It is here that the vanguard of the working class must primarily develop and lead the struggles against the capitalist system.

Now, can we at once penetrate all factories, mills and mines? Yes. We can reach masses with our propaganda and agitation that will fertilize the soil for organization. But the first prerequisite is to start in selected, strategic points and to develop a movement in these points which will spread to new places.

Here we enter into the real problem of concentration. To make it clearer, let us make a comparison. It is known how the Bolsheviks led by Lenin in the early days of the Bolshevik movement, patiently and consistently concentrated in the industrial centers such as Petrograd, Moscow, the Urals, Don Basin, Baku; how they concentrated in these centers in specific factories. There the groups were formed who learned how to establish the Party as the leader in the particular mills or mines through leading the struggles of the workers for their daily demands, politicizing these struggles, combining the struggles for the demands in the factories with the struggles for better housing conditions, with municipal problems, etc. It is from the selected places of concentration where the Bolshevik Party established itself as the leader of the workers that the influence of the Bolshevik Party spread to new factories in the territories of concentration. It was from Petrograd, the Urals, Moscow that the influence and the Party organization spread to the rest of the country. The struggles led by the Bolsheviks in these industrial centers were revolutionizing the Russian toiling masses. It was from these centers that the Bolshevik propaganda and organization reached also the masses of the poor peasants.

Looking into the history of the victorious October Revolution, we can see how the proletariat of the industrial centers where the Bolsheviks persistently concentrated for years in spite of persecution, terror, illegality, became the driving force in the revolution and how *precisely the victorious proletariat in these centers* (Petrograd, Moscow, Urals, later on in Donbas, Baku), closely allied with the large masses of the poor peasantry, was the determining factor of the final victory over capitalism.

Who were the numerous leaders of the fighting masses in those days, the heroes of the titanic struggle for the overthrow of capitalism, the heroes of the many battles of the Civil War, of the reconstruction period? The Bolsheviks grew out of the ranks of the steel workers, of the textile workers, of the miners. The victorious October Revolution was the fruit of a clear understanding of the problem of the proletarian revolution and of the dictatorship of the proletariat combined with a systematic concentration activity for years as the practical application of the Leninist conception of the mass proletarian Party.

In the light of the Bolshevik method of concentration let us analyze our concentration activities of the past. If we look at the status of our Party at this moment, at the forces around the Party, we can state that the small results achieved in the major centers are a product of what little concentration work we have done. To some extent our Party developed in four or five of the major industrial centers precisely because of our concentration work in the mobilization and organization of the unemployed, in certain mining fields, in the auto industry, etc. However, if we look with clear eyes at the masses in motion, at the battering waves against the Recovery Act, and at the spontaneous struggles taking place all over the country, we see that, in spite of its growing influence, our Party is not yet able to take leadership in the hundreds of struggles. In order to catch up with the situation, we must speed up the tempo of the building of the Party into a mass proletarian Party, rooted in the places of work and especially in the basic industries.

If we look at the past results of our Party in the light of the Open Letter, in spite of the fact that in the last period we can register some advances in influence and also in organizational results—let the bourgeois press and the renegades rejoice at the so-called “bankruptcy” and failure of our movement!—we must admit, however, and we are not hiding it, that the Party was unable to utilize to the full extent the splendid opportunities of the objective situation.

It was not that the perspective of the Party was wrong, but that we did not follow up a systematic policy of concentration. We followed the old tradition in being all over, jumping from place to

place, and more particularly, where we started to concentrate some time ago, we lacked persistency.

While leading hundreds of struggles for the daily demands of the working class we did not succeed (we shall deal with the reason later) in raising the consciousness, especially of the thousands of new members, to our fundamental task, the building of a mass proletarian Party rooted in the factories.

Our laxity in arousing the lower units, the shop nuclei, to the task that they should perform, weakened the persistence in our concentration activities, gave to our efforts at concentration a mechanical form expressed in the phrase "We tried hard but we did not succeed."

Here we must stress again: not that we did not know the method of concentration, but that the great role of concentration in the basic industries was not fully understood by the whole Party.

Certainly we don't lack experiences in concentration work. They are here under our very eyes. Certainly the Party districts of Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, New York are rich with them. But the trouble is that they are not studied, consequently, they are not popularized as a means of strengthening the whole Party. We learn very little from the experiences of the Bolshevik Party and other sections of the Communist International; we learn very little from our own experiences.

So we discover already the fundamental reasons that hindered us in the past from building the Party into a mass proletarian Party, and in doing so we indicate also the way to overcome these hindrances.

However, the reasons pointed out are not the only ones. There are still other weaknesses that must be overcome, other problems and tasks to be solved that will enable us to carry out the Open Letter in practice.

These are the problems and tasks closely connected, inter-related and rising out of the process of concentration. Upon their prompt solution depends the tempo in building a mass Party.

These are the problems of strengthening the leadership of the Party as a whole; of developing new cadres and correctly utilizing the old; of building sections and developing section leadership, of developing local leaders in the industrial centers, of collective work from the top down and vice versa, of inner democracy, of discussions which raise the consciousness of the Party toward its tasks, of planned work and control, of cutting down the numerous inner meetings that hinder the concrete mass work, of systematic recruiting, etc., etc.

All these questions are phases of the broad problem of the inner life of our Party.

Unquestionably the demand for leading forces is increasing with the growth of the influence and organizational strength of the Party, and in this respect the Central Committee, the district buros, the section buros, are pressed from all sides. While it is true that in the last few years many of the old leading forces that went over into the camp of the renegades have been replaced by new forces grown out of the struggles, our cadres are still very limited.

Being realistic, we do not forget that our Party is operating in the strongest of capitalist countries, covering an immense territory, with some of the districts of our Party larger than Central and Western Europe combined, and some of our sections covering the area of European states. In many sections of the East especially we find such industrial concentration that can be compared only with the highly-developed industrial regions of the largest European countries.

Now, what are our qualified leading forces? I do not speak of the situation in the hundreds of industrial centers—Youngstown, Akron, Canton, Warren, Lorraine, in Ohio; or Johnstown, McKeesport, Allentown, Reading, in Pennsylvania, scattered over such an immense territory—but in the centers of districts that identify themselves with such industrial colossi as Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh and others, capitals of industrial empires. We know how limited are the leading forces, restricted to few comrades on whom rests the tremendous responsibility of guiding the Party as a whole, the manifold phases of Party work in these areas, of guiding the sections, etc. We know further how the leading capable forces are still more limited in the vast sections. Moreover, we know how our best will in giving personal guidance is hindered by the hundreds of miles which many times separate the sections from the center of the districts and the units from the section leadership. And, in addition, the big traveling expenses required.

It is because of the weak forces and the weak understanding of the concentration policy, that until recently the district leadership especially was forced by the various situations—struggles breaking out here and there from one end of the district to the other—to jump from place to place. There was no district plenum, no section plenum at which the leading comrades did not have to report on their forced flying trips, here to give guidance to a strike, there to straighten out some bad situation, and elsewhere to take leadership of some unemployed struggle. Because of this situation, because of the low degree of initiative and independence of the basic units, because of the weakness of the local forces in the industrial centers,

many of our leading comrades came to look upon themselves as indispensable in all situations. Thus the initiative from below was choked and the development of the local forces into leadership was prevented.

Viewing the situation concretely, we see at once that the problem of concentration is closely connected with the problem of the development of new cadres, of local leadership, with the problem of strengthening the section leadership, the closest to the lower units, acting in the industries or on a neighborhood basis.

The experiences of the last years show us in the most self-evident manner that the leading forces are growing out of the struggles (never in the history of our Party were so many leading forces developed as in the last few years) that these forces can be trained further through national and district training courses. These experiences show us the correct path to be followed. The vital problem of cadres will be solved in the course of developing struggles in the concentration districts, by penetrating the basic industries, winning over the best forces of the American working class and by a more intensive schooling of the best elements, a more intensive education of the whole Party. *Today we are confronted with the problem of developing not hundreds, but thousands of new forces, with the problem of making each individual Party member a leader.*

This problem, again, is linked with another of vital importance, namely, the development of our press, primarily the *Daily Worker*, with the increase by the thousands of literature and leaflets, the instruments of raising the Party consciousness for penetrating the American toiling masses; with the problem of improving the technical apparatus of the sections and units which must reach the point of acting more independently in issuing their own material of agitation and propaganda in the territory in which they function. It is closely connected with the problem of collective work that must unite the comrades in their common purpose of reaching certain goals, which must unite their efforts, coordinate their activities in such a manner that division of work among them shall not mean splitting the work, but coordination. Collective work from the top down, Bolshevik self-criticism, self-correction as a lever for constructive work, combined with discussion of problems facing the Party, will not only raise the activities of the Party but will establish a sounder inner democracy and will spur the initiative of our basic units.

The Open Letter emphasized, too, the problem of planned work and control tasks. This is one of the keys to the solution of the main questions before us. Only through planned work shall we be able to systematize and coordinate our activities, to mobilize all forces

in a definite direction for the reaching of set objectives, and to develop persistence in achieving the aims set in the plans. *The control tasks flowing out of the plans will serve as the systematic check-up on results, and will control every step in the direction of the concretization of the plan.*

Here again we can take an illustration given us by the Bolshevik Party: the tremendous development of the socialist industrialization of the Soviet Union (which does not find comparison in any country in the history of the world) is the result of planned work. A plan of work, Bolshevik determination and continuous check-up, brought the accomplishment of the Five-Year Plan in four years. Was the method of planning new to the Bolsheviks in 1928, when the foundation of the Plan was laid? It was not. It was through planned work that the Bolshevik Party throughout all its history went from victory to victory, was able in certain periods to retreat with small losses and coordinate its forces for new advances, was able to smash its enemies, consolidating the revolution. It was by planning that the Bolsheviks led to the accomplishments of the reconstruction period, that they laid down the basis for the socialist industrialization of the country. It was through planned work that the basis for the collectives was laid, so that today this tremendous task is on the way to full and successful accomplishment.

The Bolshevik Party, under the leadership of Lenin and later under the leadership of his best disciple, Stalin, reviewed at its conventions and plenums the results of past work, laying new plans and control tasks for its future activities.

While deciding upon the new plans, the Party was at the same time orientating the masses of the Soviet Union toward the set goal, toward their specific tasks. Holding the steering wheel firmly in its hands in the direction of the goal, all the transmission belts were put into motion—Party apparatus, government apparatus, Soviets, trade unions, cooperatives and other mass organizations, the press and literature as formidable agitational instruments—to move strongly forward on the road of the plan, to carry it into practice. Once on the way, the control tasks serve to check up the results step by step, to discover the weaknesses, to get the necessary readjustments, to take measures for overcoming the obstacles.

All energies are concentrated in the common effort. The carrying out of the plan with its multiple phases is a collective undertaking. Bolshevik self-criticism is not a simple critique of weakness, but the Bolshevik analytic method of discovering weaknesses and pointing out simultaneously the measures for overcoming them, the determination, the will to do it, the method of self-correction with

the aim of strengthening the consciousness of the tasks to be performed.

Did we follow the Bolshevik example of planning, of concentrating our energies on the tasks flowing out of the plans? Are we taking the steps necessary to raise the understanding of the whole Party to the significance of the plan, to the tasks elaborated at our conventions and plenums?

We did this only to some extent. In our conventions and plenums we worked out plans, set goals. But at the next plenum or convention we had to admit that we were still in the same groove.

It was not because the plans were wrong, the objectives impossible to be reached. Our major weakness of the past lay in the fact that our conventions and plenums were not followed up, that the Party was not mobilized and made conscious of the plans, of the next tasks, that no check-up was made, no control exercised. It amounted to planning for planning's sake, not for fulfillment.

It is enough to go over the Party press in the periods of conventions, plenums and in the period immediately following them. The plenums are recorded, the resolutions printed. But there is not the effort of raising an intense discussion on the decisions that should have stirred and orientated the whole Party on the line laid down, that should have moved the Party to act.

We can state that in this respect the Extraordinary Conference of July 1933, and the Open Letter to the Party, are a vigorous step forward along the Bolshevik method of planning and concentration. Today the Open Letter does not remain the property only of leading committees. It is reaching the base of the Party, is starting to move the Party forward.

Every district and section today is working out its plan of work on the basis of the Open Letter. The immediate important task of the moment is to concretize the plan in practice, to check on every step, always having the main tasks before us. The next plenum will have to check up the total results, discover the weaknesses and mobilize the Party for the next steps.

At the same time we must break away from the numerous mechanical inner meetings that hinder our mass work. Here I mean especially the unit meetings with dozens of points on the agenda that prevent the discussion of vital political problems, that divide the work in a mechanical manner. This is so particularly because of the lack of initiative on the part of the unit buros, who are not yet established as the leading organs of the basic units.

This shortcoming can be overcome by making the individual member conscious that every phase of work is not something separate

but, on the contrary, part of a whole. The buro can help in this by the preparation of the agenda and proposals on the assignments, through special discussion meetings on important problems that can take the form of section membership meetings where possible, or unit meetings, this to be accomplished with the help of the section and district leadership.

Today more than ever we must solve the fundamental political and organizational problem of the Party, the Bolshevization process, the reorganization of our Party on the basis of shop nuclei. This problem has been discussed for years, and there are libraries that contain the experiences on this question—not only on an international scale but also dealing with this country. In this respect we furthermore failed to learn from the experiences of the Ford nucleus, the Sparrows Point nucleus, the McKeesport Tin Plate, the Westinghouse, the experiences of the mining nuclei, the Chicago stockyard nucleus, etc., etc. And because of this, we were not persistent in reorganizing the Party on the basis of shop nuclei. The whole Party has to be permeated by the correct conception of what a shop nucleus and unit are, namely, the Party in a specific shop, in a specific territory, as the leader of the masses. Only through extending the network of our shop nuclei, following the method of concentration, shall we succeed in anchoring the Party in hundreds of shops and mines in the basic industries. With our shop nuclei leading the daily struggles, winning the confidence of the masses in the places of work, in the neighborhoods, we shall establish ourselves as a general staff of the working class battalions. Also at this point we have to keep before our eyes our final aims, the conquest of power, because in understanding the need of building shop nuclei, we will build with persistence. By establishing the Party as the leader in concentration places, in the basic industries, we are making the first steps on the road to power.

It is through the development of the daily struggle, under the leadership of the shop nuclei, of the units, through raising the consciousness of the masses, that we will draw into the ranks of the vanguard the best elements, and our shop nuclei, limited today to a few comrades, will become mass shop nuclei. The units acting on a neighborhood basis will become mass units. The Party will become a mass Party rooted in the factories. The daily, systematic recruiting of the best elements of the working class into our ranks is an imperative task for the solution of our main problem.

Today there are thousands of American workers willing to join our ranks, that look to our Party as the champion in the struggle for the improvement of the working class conditions and for the final liberation of the proletariat. These workers enter the

Party with enthusiasm, are the most active, and immediately recruit new members. After a while, however, these elements to a great extent become discouraged. From inside the Party looks different to them than it appeared from without. The inner life permeated by sectarianism, bureaucratism and mechanical routine work is spoiling their enthusiasm. The "why" that brought them to join our ranks is not followed by continuous explanation of the "why" of the many tasks with which they are shouldered; to transform them from mere fighters for better conditions to Communists.

It is only through the improvement of the inner life of the Party, through self-correction of the older Party members that accept this criticism in theory, but in practice are still following the old traditions, that fluctuation will diminish. Then the thousands entering the Party will remain in our ranks.

What we need is a ruthless struggle against the old traditions and methods that in practice are submerging the new ones, a continuous reviewing, improving of new experiences, and a systematic check-up that will prevent the old and bad practices from getting the upper hand again.

Concentration work does not mean only directing our energies in certain strategic places, but also *concentrating* in all the phases of work that are part and parcel of the main problem before us—*building the Party into a mass proletarian Party.*
