

Winning the Masses

By J. P. COLLINS

UNDER capitalism the great mass of the people live under the dictatorship of the few. Despite the smallness of their numbers, the latter keep the mass in economic bondage. It would, however, not be feasible for the numerically small ruling class to keep the great mass in servitude merely through physical force. Therefore, it is necessary for the powers that be to control the bulk of the masses ideologically and to hinder their cultural development. This ideological control gives the bourgeoisie the necessary adherents, to maintain themselves in power. By means of this control opposition is divided and neutralized. The destruction of the ideological influence of the master-class is therefore a prerequisite to any serious attempt to engage the masses in open struggle for the destruction of capitalism. But the masses cannot be freed from mental servitude

merely by the propagation of Communist theories; a skilful handling and development of their immediate grievances against the ruling-class and its lieutenants is essential.

Degrading the Workers

In America, more than in any other country, does the whole social apparatus of the bourgeoisie—the schools, the churches, the press, the theatres and “movies,” the games, the charities—hold the worker in ignorance and mental torpor. A striking illustration of the state of the workers under these conditions has been furnished by a report of the U. S. Military Intelligence Bureau. Ninety per cent of the men examined in the army during the war possessed only the intelligence of normally developed boys of eleven to fourteen

years of age. Small wonder then that the average worker is incapable of conceiving his interests from a broad point of view. Therefore, unless such issues as the dictatorship of the proletariat and armed insurrection are presented to the average worker in relation to his bread and butter problem they are as incomprehensible to him as Einstein's theory. We must then meet the worker on his own basis and inject in him a fighting spirit—a desire to struggle for better conditions. Thus only can his interests be pitted against the interests of the ruling class. Thus only will the workingman's self-confidence be gradually increased until it grows into class consciousness. It is innumerable and costly struggles, shattered hopes and disillusionments, that will more and more weaken the bourgeois influence over the worker and slowly but surely tear him away from the ideology which now enslaves him.

The Task We Confront

It is true that the bourgeoisie have a gigantic apparatus of propaganda. It is true that ours is a mere toy in comparison with it. Nevertheless, the task of the bourgeoisie is correspondingly great. They must distract the masses or oppose their true interests by fooling and betraying them. We, however, frankly stand for the interests of the masses. Our influence depends largely upon what we say and what we do, our tactics and our policies of approaching the working class. For us the skill in keeping in touch with the masses, organically and ideologically, is paramount.

The problem of winning over the masses simmers down to taking up their every day grievances, to engaging in their bread and butter struggles. We must lead the counter-moves and maneuvers. We must expose the bourgeois machinations. We must direct the sentiments of the masses towards us and along our channels. It is for us to draw them more and more into action in their own behalf. *Mass sentiments*, taking root in immediate grievances, must be used as the basis of mass distrust of the ruling class and its servants, while the self-reliance of the workers is being developed. Against the strategy of the bourgeoisie striving to control the masses we must pit the strategy of the Communist Party. To the politicians of the bourgeoisie we must oppose the politicians of the proletariat. The class struggle is a struggle against exploitation. Politically the struggle manifests itself between the capitalist class and the proletarian vanguard organized in the Communist Party. Our objective is the winning of the masses. The capitalist objective is the perpetuation of bourgeois control.

Fulfilling Our Role

How can the Party obtain its objective, fulfill its role? This is a question involving policies and organizational machinery. In so far as policies are concerned, thanks to the Communist International, we are on the right track. But in so far as working forces are concerned to carry out these policies we find ourselves seriously hampered. We are

blocked by the inexperience of our membership, by our isolation from the masses, by our sectarianism.

We have built an underground party, and have come to believe firmly in its all-sufficiency. We have virtually disappeared from the public scene. We ourselves have discarded whatever legal medium has not been wiped out by the ruling class. We are inarticulate, self-centered; so much so that we count ourselves active when we, once in a while, issue a leaflet.

The Party today is a cumbersome, inflexible mechanism having no movement to function in, no connection with or influence upon the life of the masses, no outlet from its underground all-sufficiency. This imprisonment of our revolutionary energies demoralizes us. Several times have we been broken asunder by clique formations, individual intrigues and peanut politics.

From Talk to Action

At present we are in a stage of transition—from a sectarian propaganda group to a party of action. Those who oppose the change oppose the Communist International, oppose the needs of the class struggle, fight the inevitable. They will be left behind because the onrush of events knows no delay, no compromise of facts. The day of action being limited to occasional leaflet distributions and "chewing the rag" at group meetings is over for the C. P. of A.

The task of the Party is prescribed by the needs of the working class. The needs of the working class determine our Party policies. *The crying need is an open political rallying center.* There are hundreds of thousands of rebels of various shades demoralized and disconnected. The Party must offer a medium for their unification and utilization for the revolutionary struggle. This can only be done by initiating a political mass movement broad enough to take in the bulk of this rebel element. The Socialist Party is doomed; the other factions are dead or dying. For us not to utilize this opportunity for the initiation of such a movement is deliberately to deliver the field to our enemies. This would be an act of blind stupidity of which only sectarians of the worst type could be guilty. Through the extensive use of such a political center we may lead the revolutionary elements back to constructive work in the labor movement. We shall then be in a position to organize with greater ease and efficiency the militants in the labor unions for a revival of rank and file demands, for a change in leadership, and for the strengthening and the transformation of labor organizations.

The Days Ahead

Those who do not want the C. P. of A. to take up this work do not want a Communist Party at all. What will be the function of the C. P. of A. after it has projected itself across the political field? First of all, the membership of the underground party will be strictly confined to the most able and conscious revolutionists. The function of the underground Party will be almost entirely to guide and control

the broad, open organization and movement. Our Party committees and groups will not waste their time at underground meetings with the routine of selling tickets, books and pamphlets. Such matters can be attended to by any one, openly. Our members will meet to discuss tactics and policies, to initiate activities. The underground party will be a huge caucus of well organized, well disciplined revolutionists, functioning throughout as a unit. At the same time, all that can be done openly will be done so by means of the open apparatus.

Within the underground party our program and theory must be thoroughly clarified. The correctness of our policies must constantly be emphasized to those in the open organization. Towards the masses, however, we must move cautiously, step by step. We should draw them into the direct struggle on the basis of their immediate interests which they can readily appreciate. More and more the direct struggle will develop, sharpening the lines between the interests of the workers and the interests of the ruling class. The more the struggle for immediate needs develops, the more will our program be understood as offering the sole remedy. This will occur, however, only if we are so organized as to consciously participate in the struggle, and aim for leadership. At all times we should inject our ideas, interpretations, mottoes, slogans and plans to storm every trench in the struggle.

Pressing Need for Action

The immediate need of the Party is the creation and perfection of the open movement. In one form or another, all branches and groups must come into the open, gather around themselves the sympathizers and rebels of their own localities and organize them for all open activities. The Party committees should discuss the issues of the day, methods of giving expression to the needs of the workers, and the tactics of rallying more workers. Every move made by the bourgeoisie and their lieutenants will be discussed, with a view of answering. We must consider plans for putting the sympathizers to work for our policies. We must always have in mind the mass outside. It is imperative for us to correlate all our work with the needs of the mass of workers.

In Cross-Section

The Central Executive Committee will decide the general policies. Their application will be attended to by subordinate committees. As much discussion as possible should precede Party decisions. But *once a course of action has been decided upon the only thing debatable, until the coming convention, is its manner of application.* Thus only can policies be put into effect with the required speed throughout the country. All revolutionary parties must pursue this policy.

The prerequisite for our work with sympathizers is a preliminary general agreement amongst ourselves on the main

points of action. In carrying out our labor program we will find a far greater number of sympathizers than in our political work. But in neither case should we adopt arbitrary or crude methods. We can win leadership only through convincing the workers of the correctness of our position. This we must attempt to do even when we are assured of a majority to carry our proposition, for the problem is to get the workers to act for our program. This they will do only when they understand it and are enthusiastic for its realization.

Rallying the Masses

A caucus without a program which expresses the needs of the workers in their field of organization is useless. For example, a caucus in the Needle Trades could get the sympathy of the worker on the question of a bona fide Federation of all Needle Trade Unions into an industrial body. The unification issue in one form or another can, as a matter of fact, be used in most American unions. In every one of them in varying form, it corresponds to the needs of the Labor movement. Again, a struggle for shorter hours and higher wages may furnish a platform against the bureaucrats in some unions. The union shop may also be instituted and preserved by us.

In soldiers' organizations the bonus issue may be injected to alienate them from the government. The impoverishment of the farmers and tenant farmers offers an opportunity for building a powerful movement. We must destroy their bourgeois ideology. It is evident, then, that only around such urgent objectives of labor can we build Communist political thought.

Conclusion

Whatever the issue, whatever the program, it must mean action by the masses themselves—not by officials for the masses. It must mean intensification of the opposition to things as they are, to the government and to the labor-bureaucracy. It must bring in its wake greater unification of the workers, larger masses into the struggle. To all of this we must impart a Communist tendency, a Communist hue.

The Communist Party is face to face with all these activities and struggles. We must crystallize the discontent of the masses in all walks of life. We must gradually draw the masses into a more and more general struggle as a class. This is the task of a Party of action! This is our task! We must win the American working masses for Communism!