April 1975 DC Jobs Rally

Using Mass Line To Sum Up Struggle

This article was submitted on the basis of some comrades' discussion of the Dec. 15, 1975 and March 15, 1976 articles in Revolution on the mass line—Ed.

In the last six months two articles have appeared in Revolution on the mass line. They have given rise to tremendous discussion and enthusiasm throughout the Party and among the advanced workers and others. Comrades are trying to study and grasp the principles summed up in them and use them as a guide in forging even stronger links with the masses and in leading the struggle to transform the world through class struggle. Some of us began to use them to sum up past practice, too, not so much from the point of view of going over everything we ever did, but from looking at errors in the past to illuminate the path of the future. This article reflects some of this discussion. As communists we have nothing to fear from the truth and we should learn from past mistakes in order to prevent them in the future.

April 26, a year ago, 40,000 workers, mainly employed, rallied in Washington, DC, demanding jobs. Shortly after the rally began, some advanced workers led a demonstration of about 2,000 out of the stands and onto the field.

At the time, the Revolutionary Union [a national communist organization which played a key role in the formation of the RCP—Ed.] was not united on how to sum it up. An ambiguous article was printed in Revolution, summing up the rally and the action on the field. It was summed up, in some places, with advanced workers who had been involved, that the communists and advanced workers shouldn't have taken the field because it just isolated the advanced, while in some other areas of the country it was put forward as a vanguard action and an inspiration to the masses.

What brings this struggle to the fore now is the current mobilizations the Party has entered into, particularly for July 4th. What does it mean for communists to "create favorable new conditions through struggle?" How do communists do this without isolating the advanced from the rest of the class? How does advanced activity, whether in Philadelphia or on the shop floor, strengthen and develop our movement?

These questions are crucial in our work overall and we can learn something about them by summing up what was right and what was wrong with April 26.

The jobs rally had been called by the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO. These same bureaucrats, who sabotage on a daily basis any struggle against layoffs that breaks out in the plants, were going to mobilize the workers to petition Congress for what the bureaucrats refused to fight for on the shop floor. To this end, they organized the rally in RFK Stadium, carefully tried to keep a lid on it, and planned to parade before the workers "their own" leaders—themselves and political puppets like Hubert Humphrey.

Angry and Frustrated

Barely ten minutes into the rally people in the stadium were angry and frustrated. They had come to Washington to demand jobs, in part carrying hopes for the political clout of the AFL-CIO leaders, and even more so, to unite with thousands of other workers to demonstrate their demands.

But the leadership of the event refused to organize it, fearing what might be unleashed if they spoke to the real situation. They kept the masses inactive, with no recourse but to listen to endless speeches about what these people were going "to do for them." In addition, District 65 of the Distributive Workers union (DWA) and AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) had tried to pull a march in the morning to the stadium, which was dispirited and disorganized and left the masses discouraged and down.

At the rally itself the lack of organization, spirit, and discipline, as well as the overall line which robbed the workers of any initiative in carrying out their own struggle, was a slap in the face to people who had traveled as long as 8-10 hours to get to the event. So about 20 minutes into the rally, one or two youths ran across the field, not so much to make a particular political point as to slap them back, to do something out-of-bounds and get away with it.

The great majority of workers there took it up in just this way, cheering the people running around the field and booing the security guards who were chasing after them in Keystone Cop fashion. Initially it wasn't much of a serious thing but, like spitting in the master's soup and winking at the other slaves, it was an

expression of rebellion and breaking out—even if in a joking way—of the bounds the union officials and politicians put on the struggle.

This little spark of resistance and the mood of frustration among the masses was picked up on by the activist workers there—workers from UWOC, United May Day Committee in New York/New Jersey, and other organized rank and file groups in the shops, many of whose members look to communists for leadership. A few workers ran on the field with banners from organized groups demanding Jobs or Income. This began to focus the general outrage around the political demand for jobs and the anger people felt at a rally which was going nowhere.

The trickle turned into a torrent and ten minutes later the field was covered by hundreds of workers who, though somewhat disorganized, were walking around with their banners, surrounding the speakers' platform and generally causing a ruckus. In some places and intermittently, workers still up in the stands along with those on the field, took up the chant for "Jobs Now!" to the point where Humphrey, who was in the middle of one of his orations, was forced to squeak along—"Yes. Jobs. That's what we want. Jobs. That's right."

Back Into the Stands

After some attempts to organize a march around the field with a clearer political focus, communists tried to lead people to display their banners to those still up in the bleachers and then to go back into the

stands to organize the rebellion on a broader basis and give it a more focused and organized character. We succeeded in leading most of the workers back into the stands, leaving the field to assorted Trotskyites and other weirdos, who continued to parade around, making a spectacle of themselves. At one point some Trots seized the mike and shortly thereafter the rally was called off by the sponsors.

It was clear that the activity on the field was going to be attacked by the union bureaucrats, by the revisionists (who had promoted the whole affair, including, of course, the bourgeois politicians from Humphrey to Bella Abzug) and by every other bourgeois force who had the opportunity to say anything about it. It was especially clear that they would blame the cancellation of the rally on the workers who took the field.

While on one level the communists involved knew the activity on the field had to be defended, there were still questions: Should the advanced forces have led the masses onto the field in the first place? Was it right to lead people back into the stands? And how much should the advanced promote the activity on the field as an example and inspiration to other workers?

Careful in Preparation

When the rally was announced in March members of the RU tried to assess the forces involved, under what conditions the call was being put out, and what the whole thing represented. Some things were clear. There was widespread outrage among the masses around the unemployment situation, not only among the unemployed, but far into the ranks of the employed workers as well. It was on the basis of this sentiment that the hacks were going to mobilize the workers—as a pressure group on Congress, as political capital for their own careers, to maintain the appearance within their own unions that they were "serious" and "sincere" about doing something and as weapons in the infighting for power within the AFL-CIO bureaucracy. The demonstration was originally called by top hacks in AFSCME, Hospital Local 1199 and similar "progressive"-talking unions to build their reputations as leaders of the masses. The leaders of the industrial unions stepped in to "co-sponsor" the rally and to undercut it by not mobilizing

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Party Must Answer Questions Of Masses On War

The following article was written based on discussions among people in a Party branch. We hope it will kick off still more discussion, taking the article "On the World Situation, War and Revolutionary Struggle" from the November 15, 1975 Revolution as a framework—Ed.

The November 15, 1975 Revolution article, "On the World Situation, War and Revolutionary Struggle" has started more than one discussion over the past months. Talking about it again recently, we began to get a hold of some of the ways our practice and experience have shown its importance.

Not only are the capitalists gearing up the machinery of war, the bourgeois media is trying to gear us up for war. News reports are full of scare stories about the size and strength of the Soviet military machine. And they have used the Soviet intervention in Angola to try to line people up behind U.S. imperialism.

It's certainly true that some of the ruling class' propaganda is getting over, based partly on peoples' opposition to Soviet aggression and on the fact that people feel caught in a position where there seems to be no way out but to fight for them. But every day we see the hatred people have for war, and the feelings that this is a hell of a way to live.

Recently we ran into a veteran at the unemployment office who had been looking for a job without much luck. He said he hoped there would be another war because war means jobs. Just then an older man came out of the office and, hearing what the veteran said, replied, "Not me. If that's their solution, I'm not going—that won't solve their problems. I served in Korea and I'm not going to fight for them again."

The war in Vietnam shook up this country. Shook it up because some things about the ruling class be-

came clearer. They talked about democracy, but supported dictatorship; talked about foreign aid but protected their own profits; talked about the aggressive North Vietnamese while they tried to bomb the country "back to the Stone Age" when it became clear that the Vietnamese people would never accept the yoke of U.S. imperialism and were inspiring others around the world to oppose them.

For many—brother after brother came home in a box—being against the war was a question of life and death. The great majority of American people came to oppose the war—and for the working class it taught many of us that we had *no* interests in common with the war makers. The war in Vietnam raised questions for many more about the nature of a system which depends on war, but the questions remain unanswered for large numbers of workers.

The ruling class today is preparing like crazy to come up with a "cause" that will convince the working class to fight for them. If we fail to build a conscious working class movement now, we will be unprepared. We must find a thousand ways to build a movement that will show that our only recourse is to fight against them, even in the event of war.

New War Raises New Questions

Some of the questions raised by the threat of war are the same as before—because in fact war is an inevitable law of capitalism. But, as the possibility of a world war between the two superpowers becomes more likely, it raises up a number of questions we never faced before.

1) Who is the "aggressor"? A simplistic rule of thumb about wars is to be against the aggressor. But this could lead us into supporting a U.S. war against Soviet aggression. Lenin attacked such thinking during WW1 when Germany attacked Belgium and occupied it and various other powers declared war on Germany. He pointed out that when these imperialist countries attacked Germany it was not for defense or the "liberation and indemnification of Belgium." Each country sought to defeat Germany and grab up some of the spoils of the German Empire.

He said that it was impossible to side with the other powers (England, Russia, Italy, France) against Germany because the effect would not be to help Belgium but to help strangle Austria-Hungary or Turkey and any other area these powers sought to grab. "Herein, precisely, lies the specific feature of imperialist war, war between reactionary-bourgeois, historically obsolete governments, waged for the purpose of oppressing other nations. Whoever justifies participation in the present war perpetuates imperialist oppression of nations." (Lenin, "Socialism and War," Lenin on War and Peace, Three Articles)

Our movement has to say that it is not a question

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Mass Line...

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and not organizing it, so their rivals, the "progressive" hacks, would wind up with a black eye for their efforts. All this infighting affected what went on at the rally.

Whether or not communists would unite with the masses of workers at the rally, and determining the forms for doing that, were the first questions that had to be settled. In the first article on the mass line it says:

"...in order to apply the mass line, the Party must base itself firmly on the understanding that people learn through their own experience, and not simply through 'being told' what is correct and what must be done.

"No Party is fit to lead the masses, nor can it be in any position to determine what must be done and how to do it, unless it continually strengthens its ties with the masses and takes part, together with them, in the daily struggle against exploitation and oppression, and assists them in forging links between their struggles against the common enemy."

This is true not only of the daily battles that go on in the shops, but also of the struggle that takes the form of activity like this demonstration.

The communists' task was not to stand off to the side and say "don't demonstrate because this raily is being called by the wrong people," but to unite with the thousands of workers who were going there to demonstrate their demand for jobs, to assist them in waging this struggle, to organize it into as conscious an expression of this as possible, and especially to make the links between this rally for jobs and the overall movement of the working class and also to the struggle that was going on daily in the shops against the layoffs.

Unfold Exposure

Against a line of going to Washington mainly to raise the demands for May Day (April 26 was a week before the May Day demonstration), the RU and advanced forces close to it (for example, the United May Day Committee in NY/NJ) united around a policy of "unfolding around a particular struggle exposure of the system of exploitation which continually gives rise to such outrages and abuses and to indicate the links between the different struggles against this system."

(Mass Line article, Dec. 15, 1975) We sought to focus in on unemployment, expose the system that gives rise to it, and point the way forward.

Communists and other advanced workers also united against going there to "expose the hacks." That had to be done, but that was a question of summing up repeated experience on the part of the masses, not just saying "they called this rally to further their careers, so follow us."

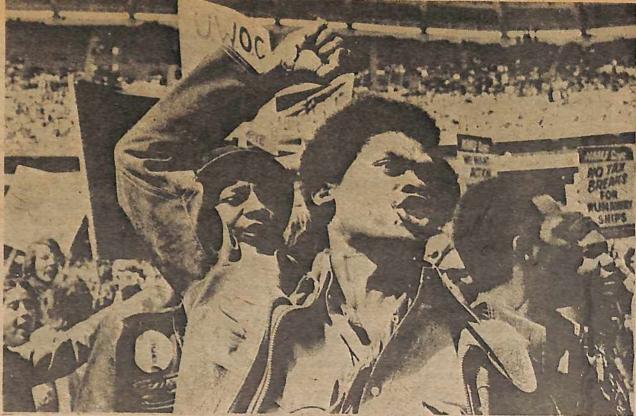
The masses had had some experience with the sabotage of the union bureaucrats in the struggle against layoffs that was already going on in the shops. However, these bourgeois agents were by no means thoroughly exposed and isolated. It was on the basis of the influence they still had among the masses, especially as the only ones who could accomplish or at least lead anything in the political arena, that they were going to be able to mobilize so many for the rally.

Given this, the method had to be to build on the experience the masses had with the bureaucrats in the shop by summing it up, continue to jam the leaders into building the rally itself, and put forward at least the direction, if not a full program, of intensifying the fight for every job in the plants. The advanced forces also wanted to put out a clear line of Employed/Unemployed, Same Crisis, Same Fight.

With this general orientation, communists and other advanced workers organized in the shops to go to the rally. Workers demanded, and won in several locals, that buses be provided to go—particularly in UAW plants where the leadership refused to organize for the demonstration at all. In the union District 65, the bureaucrats had chartered buses and trains and then gave the seats to their hack friends from the Teamsters with whom they were contemplating a merger. Workers fought, and in some cases won, to get the seats back for other workers. And the Unemployed Workers Organizing Committee (UWOC) organized several busloads of unemployed workers, who, of course, had been left out of the picture by the AFL-CIO officials.

Communists tried to apply this general orientation to determine tactics for the rally itself. Rather than organizing to go down to Washington separately or trying to organize some kind of separate contingent at the rally, the line was to link up tightly with the masses throughout and, on the basis of being immersed among them and not somewhere off to the side, try to organize and agitate in whatever ways possible. That is, communists had to find appropriate forms to advance the struggle, while paying careful attention to not separating off the advanced from the rest of the class

The rumors beforehand were that the rally was going to be tight and well organized. Also, the RU mem-



Workers stormed onto the field tired of listening to endless jive from politicians during April, 1975 jobs rally at RFK Stadium in Washington, DC.

bers expected that most or at least many of the forces under their leadership wouldn't even be able to get into the stadium because so many people were going to be there. Under these conditions, they thought the best way to move things forward was to agitate on the buses and trains on the way down, sneak banners into the stadium and try to raise them, start some mass chanting of the key demands, and outside the stadium go among the masses and agitate around the line on the rally and the struggle, trying to pull together minirallies.

Up to the point of arrival at the stadium, this line was carried out with great success. On the trains the advanced forces passed out thousands of leaflets on the jobs rally, as well as agitating (as a secondary task) and selling buttons for May Day. On the buses meetings were held using the drivers' mikes, agitating for a militant, working class line on the rally and summing up with the masses the struggle going on in the shops and within the unions.

On one bus there was lively struggle over the impending cutbacks in New York City hospitals—what role the workers had to play and how to unite with forces in the community over the question of patient care. Should the workers work harder, accept speedup and forced overtime, to provide better care? Or should they break with the bosses, demand that more workers be hired and better patient care come out of their hides, not the workers?

While it came up in a particular form here, over providing services, this same fundamental question kept coming up—Do we have to unite with the bosses to keep this society going or are our interests and theirs irreconcilable and do we advance by fighting them for our own needs and the needs of the masses?

The overall correctness of the line of merging with the struggle of the masses rather than organizing a separate contingent for the rally was being borne out in practice.

Conditions Change

When we arrived at the rally, the conditions we had anticipated changed drastically. Due to the sabotage of the union leadership, the numbers of workers were nowhere near what was expected, so the organized advanced forces had no difficulty in getting into the stadium. There was practically no security at the rally so organized groups of workers were easily able to take in their banners. By the time the rally started the stadium was ringed with huge banners from rank and file groups demanding "Jobs or Income." And especially with all the lack of organization, discipline or any sign of real protest, the masses were in a rebellious mood. It was under these conditions that the advanced workers led the hundreds onto the field.

The line taken throughout had been to stick with the masses and especially not to isolate the advanced from the rest of the class. This would leave an opening where the bourgeoisie could jump in and attack the advanced, separating the vanguard of the movement from everyone else and paving the way for greater suppression and demoralization of the masses. In everything it is important to make our target as narrow as possible, "uniting the many to defeat the few."

At the same time, the communists tried to make the base of activity as broad as possible, so the bourgeoisie couldn't just lash out at the advanced, separating them off from everyone else as a bunch of outsiders, petty-bourgeois radicals, or opposition group out to over-throw the leadership of the unions to further their own careers. In the course of being mobilized many times over around a program representing their own interests, the working class unites its ranks even more firmly and better isolates the main enemy, as well as the enemy's

agents within their own ranks.

Fearing the way the bourgeoisie could use the cleavage between the advanced and the rest of the class, the communists tended to oppose the advanced action on the field. After trying to organize the masses on the field into a more disciplined demonstration, they led people back up into the stands.

RU members later summed up the action on the field as a "left" error, a "rash advance," which isolated the advanced forces, not only from the masses of other workers who were at the rally, but from the masses of workers around the country. There was special concern about this because those summing it up thought the masses of workers had no way of distinguishing between the honest workers on the field from the petty-bourgeois opportunist creeps there, and therefore would not take up the action as their own.

In the second article on the mass line it says:

"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."

By summing up the field action as a bad thing, what those of us involved at that time failed to see was that "linking up with the masses," being immersed in their struggle, didn't entirely settle the questions and never can. While, on the one hand, communists couldn't have led the masses unless they were sticking close by them and coming from within their ranks, on the other hand, once communists and advanced forces were within the ranks of the broad masses of workers and, to whatever extent they were within, there still remained the question of what were they going to do.

The situation changed, the masses were angry and frustrated at what was going on. And the communists

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were there saying that the lackeys were obstacles to our struggle, but when it came time to push ahead and roll over them—and where the advanced forces had the freedom to move on that—instead of trying to consolidate a core on the field, in effect the RU members just told people to go back into the stands and that what happened on the field wasn't very good.

In the statement from our Party's Central Committee honoring Chou En-lai (*Revolution*, Jan. 15, 1976), there is the important principle that communists must be both "conscientious in preparation and bold in execution." This is an important lesson, which was not well grasped at the time. Failing to fully seize the time for advanced political action meant not making full enough use of the opportunity that was there, based both on changed conditions and the careful and correct work done before in the shops and on the buses.

By being one-sided and formal in applying the line of "uniting with the masses," the advanced forces at that time backed off from the struggle with the bourgeoisie and failed to take advantage of what freedom there was, not only to intensify the struggle for jobs by showing there was a force capable of taking it on, but also to advance the conscious movement of the working class against capital and their lackeys, including the ones who organized the rally, by showing that such a movement actually existed.

This lays the basis for struggle at a higher, more conscious level, in the shops as well as in broader struggles like the rally. This is what it means as Mao Tsetung says, to "create favorable new conditions through struggle."

Struggle to Sum It Up

Because this summation was one-sided, the communists were afraid of being incapable of resisting the inevitable attacks from the bourgeoisie. They were afraid that in the struggle to sum it up, which would go on broadly to the extent they gave it national TV coverage or reported it in the bourgeois press, and in any case would go on in the unions with attacks from the officials, the masses would be won to the bourgeoisie's summation because communists weren't everywhere to sum it up with them.

The RU members saw the enemy's strength, what they could put out through the media and what they would say in the unions but not their weakness, that their rotten system and the unemployment it causes was bound to give rise to widespread outrage among the masses.

They saw their own weakness, lack of links and organizations broadly in the working class, but not their strength, the deep-felt hatred among the masses of workers for a situation wherein the millions of able hands are idle and even their means of existence, their very ability to work, is ripped away from them.

The reason they summed it up wrong was that the communists at that time failed to correctly identify and rely on the sentiment of the masses around unemployment and the daily shackling of their struggle by

the trade union leaders. In fact, the advanced were sick of the whole business, including the handcuffs placed on them by the union bureaucrats, and wanted to fight.

The intermediate were also against unemployment and thought the rally might accomplish something. They didn't oppose the union leaders outright, but they didn't trust them either. Only a handful of the backward were that concerned about what was supposed to go on at the official rally and were angry or upset that the rally was disrupted.

By confusing the sentiment of the backward for that of the intermediate, communists failed to really release the initiative of the advanced and to rely on them to "raise the level of the intermediate and win over the backward," as Mao Tsetung has summed up. At the point when the RU members were leading people back into the stands there were still workers coming down onto the field.

And while it is still not clear what more could actually have been done on the field itself, just the fact that people dared to take things into their own hands and break through the bounds placed on them by the officials, although in a disorganized way, was a tremendous inspiration to the masses and could have been more so if the advanced forces had summed it up correctly.

The lesson here is that if you want others to be strong you've got to be strong yourself.

Galvanize Broad Numbers

What the RU members missed in summing it up as a bad thing was that the question of whether an action will isolate the advanced is a question of whether the action reflects and represents the real sentiments of the masses. If it does, the masses will support it and take it up as their own, not only in the sphere of ideological struggle, but in the practical struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie as well.

"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." (Mass Line article, March 15, 1976)

The test of this was that when the bourgeoisie did attack the field action, many workers in shops all over the country supported the action for what it was—a kick in the teeth at the two-headed monster of the capitalists and top union leadership and an inspiration to people taking things into their own hands.

This is a profound lesson which we have to grasp deeply—and dialectically—especially in the context of intensifying our work in the daily battles of the workers. Tactics are serious business. On the 26th, when the conditions had changed greatly from what had been expected and the situation was moving very quickly, decisions were not easy to make. Orientation and strategic line come into play in an even more concentrated way than in struggles which develop at a slower pace. But like it says in the March mass line article:

"...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 concen-

trating 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 painty.""

The work of communists in the April 26 jobs demonstration was a success to the extent that the mass line was correctly practiced. The work proceeded from the basic stand of uniting with the desire and determination of the masses to fight for jobs. Although May Day was only a week off, the demonstration was not used as an opportunity to "build" May Day by ignoring the struggle the masses were in, except to pimp off it. May Day was built for, but not in this narrow way.

Nor did the communists set up some "counter-demonstration" that would pull a handful of advanced workers out of the struggle to some "pure" position safe from the ferment of the class struggle.

But immersion in the masses, deep roots in the class struggle, have no meaning unless they are the basis for moving that struggle forward toward its historic goal. Our ties with the masses, such as they are at any given time, are deepened not as some precondition to building struggle, but precisely in the course of building struggle. Thus, uniting broadly with the masses and struggle build each other in a dialectical spiral when the mass line is practiced.

To do this we must take into account that the masses don't move as a unified bloc. In any group there are advanced, intermediate and backward. As the advanced come forward, there arises a spontaneous tendency, often among the advanced themselves, to pull away from the intermediate and backward.

Advanced activity, carried on incorrectly, can play into this tendency, isolating the advanced. But especially as the advanced themselves are armed with an understanding of the mass line, such activity can be a motor, driving forward the struggle of the broad masses. The key is in applying the mass line. If an action reflects and concentrates the needs and aspirations of the masses, it can trigger their activity and develop their understanding. Without such advanced activity to spark the struggle, the workers movement will inevitably be confined to what is narrow and bourgeois.

The April 26, 1975 jobs action by the masses made positive contributions to building the workers' sense of their struggle and their power. Given still better communist leadership, its contributions could have been still greater. In learning from this experience and in building from it to step up our work in advancing the revolutionary struggle of the working class, it is crucial to deepen our grasp and understanding of the mass line.

Publications

- Programme and Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA. 175 pages. \$1.00.
- Our Class Will Free Itself And All Mankind Speech by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Central Committee of the RCP,USA. 30 pages. 75 cents.
- CUBA: The Evaporation of a Myth. Re-