
MAIN ORGANIZATIONAL TASKS OF THE DEMOCRATIC FRONT

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[*This is the fourth in Comrade Foster's series of articles. The next contribution, entitled "Secondary Aspects of Mass Organization," will appear in the July issue of THE COMMUNIST.—The Editors*]

THE present series of articles in *The Communist* is especially stressing the urgent need of the democratic front forces to adopt more effective methods of mass agitation, organization and struggle. This need exists because the fascists and reactionaries generally, with their insolent demagoguery, ruthless discipline, airtight organization and policy of continuous attack, have rendered obsolete the customary hit-or-miss, loose methods now widely prevalent in democratic front organizations. Consequently, just as on the international scale disconnected peace-desiring countries cannot stem the war advance of the closely allied fascist powers, so, likewise, within the United States itself a loose majority of democratically-minded people is not strong enough to defeat the demoralizing mass activities of well-organized and ruthless reaction. Popular majorities in the United States, like the democratic countries of the world, must be firmly

organized or be cut to pieces by the enemy. This is why organizational questions today take on a far more vital political significance than ever before.

Our Party, with its Marxist-Leninist training and the world experience of the Communist International to draw upon, has the task, as the vanguard of the proletariat, of helping energetically in drastically improving the organization methods of the masses.

At the Eighteenth Congress of the C.P.S.U., Comrade Zhdanov stated: "The distinguishing feature of our Party consists in the fact that at all stages of its revolutionary activity it has attached exceptional importance to organization." He also spoke of the need of "raising the organizational work to meet the demands of the political line." These statements apply with special force to the American democratic front movement. The future of our Party will depend in large measure upon the extent to which it understands this fact and leads in this necessary improvement of the mass organizations. The purpose of this article is to indicate in outline the main spheres of the organization work of the democratic front and the directions in which it needs strengthening.

1. ORGANIZING THE MASS OFFENSIVE

The first group of organizational tasks of the democratic front constitute the general problem of intensifying the offensive of the people's democratic movement in support of its economic and political demands. This task is, of course, not simply organizational in character, but political work of the highest type, involving many questions of analysis, demands, timing, etc. It is the matter of sharpening up the struggle for democracy, peace, industrial recovery, equitable taxation, and all the other planks of the democratic front program.

The political situation is ripe for speeding up the present too slow tempo of mass struggle, first, because the workers, farmers and middle class elements are in a militant mood and ready actively to support the New Deal program; secondly, because the leaders of various key mass organizations, responsive to the militant mass moods, are willing to back up policies of progressive advance; and, thirdly, because the Roosevelt Administration, despite its many shortcomings, is liberal and disposed to make a defense of democracy, peace and the mass welfare. Besides, it is necessary that the masses go more actively over into the offensive because the employers, encouraged by their November election successes and the inability of the New Deal so far to overcome the economic crisis, are straining every nerve to develop a great offensive of their own to sweep the New Deal forces to defeat in 1940.

The offensive of the democratic front forces needs added stress, first, along the individual sectors—eco-

nomie, trade union, peace, youth, etc. Thus, the struggle for the New Deal recovery program should be greatly sharpened; the fight for relief for the unemployed and the farmers also needs intensification; on the trade union front the work of organizing the unorganized should be stepped up; in the peace sector there is need to speed up the struggle to repeal the Neutrality Act and to mobilize the masses to support an active cooperation of the democratic powers to put a halt to Hitler's and Mussolini's war aggressions; among the youth the campaign for the right to jobs should be doubly invigorated, in the national groups the fight against fascist agitation must be increased, and so on along the several sectors of the mass struggle.

Secondly, these sectional advances on the various fronts must be integrated and intensified as a general offensive of the whole democratic front for the broad political program of the masses, to culminate in the coming national elections. The fate of the New Deal forces in 1940 depends upon the measure in which the democratic masses can develop this great election offensive.

In my article in last month's issue of *The Communist*, entitled "The Technique of the Mass Campaign," I dealt in detail with the principles of mass organization involved in developing and conducting offensives in special spheres and along all sectors jointly, and in my article in *The Communist* for February, entitled "New Methods of Political Mass Organization," I gave the specific organizational forms by which the democratic front as a whole can go forward most effectively.

These articles should be studied and the necessary conclusions drawn therefrom. There should also be more thorough analyses made of all the problems of the offensive. Fascists boast of their skill in using the offensive, but Communists should be far better masters than they of the key strategy of the advance.

2. CONSOLIDATING THE TOILERS' RANKS

The second group of urgent democratic front organizational tasks have to do with unifying the ranks of the various democratic mass organizations. The loose organizational forms and disconnected activities that we see all about us are a great handicap to developing the offensive of the people against reaction and also to every other phase of the mass struggle. The necessary work of tightening up the ranks of the people's forces is not only organizational but highly political.

Thus, the new C.I.O. unions confront the task of fully absorbing their armies of new members and of developing their new leaderships. Then there is the need to link the A. F. of L. craft unions more closely together by federations and amalgamations. But the greatest, all-decisive task in unifying the ranks of the trade unions is to re-establish unity between the A. F. of L. and the C.I.O., which is fundamentally the job of incorporating into the structure of organized labor generally the great progressive mass of newly-organized workers from the basic industries. The peace movement presents a similar urgent need for inner consolidation, as the present too loose groupings are developing only a fraction of their potential power. Between the trade unions and

farmers' organizations there also exists a great need for closer relations and more consistent joint action, and every possibility to accomplish this increased solidarity must be explored.

Other democratic groups, such as the national groups and the great, predominantly proletarian, fraternal orders, need greater internal unity and more mutual connections. All the many tasks of unifying the people's forces against reaction converge in the general necessity of linking together the innumerable economic, political, cultural and social organizations of the workers, farmers, professionals, and small business elements into a broad democratic front in support of the New Deal program. This great central task involves a veritable maze of political-organizational considerations of the most decisive importance.

Our Party has dealt repeatedly with the various political and organizational aspects of this broad question of building the democratic front; in my article in *The Communist* for February, "New Methods of Political Mass Organization," I have tried to render concrete its organizational aspects. In this whole problem of consolidation, of unification, we Communists bear great responsibility. We are the most consistent advocates of centralization and united action, and hence, more than any others, we should be able to work effectively in unifying the toilers' ranks, whether in large or small degree; in every sector and on the whole front.

3 RECRUITING THE PEOPLE'S FORCES

As we have seen, the building of the democratic front and the specific

preparations for victory in the 1940 elections imperatively demand that the masses begin to go over onto the offensive and that they draw together their at present too disconnected movements into more compact forms. It is no less urgent also that the respective mass organizations be greatly strengthened by systematic recruiting of their ranks.

In spite of all the organization work that has been done in recent years the great mass of the people still remain unorganized. The 8,000,000 trade unionists, for example, are only a fraction of the workers eligible to unions, and it is the same situation regarding farmers, youth, Negroes, women and professionals. The bulk are outside the organizations. In these days of increasing struggle this is a dangerous situation. The democratic front needs the added strength of these masses, and while they remain unorganized they are dangerously exposed to the demoralizing demagoguery of the reactionaries. The intense class struggle of today demands imperatively that the very maximum possible of the masses be organized.

The political situation is favorable for the growth of all forms of democratic mass organization. The workers, farmers and other toilers, under the pressure of difficult economic conditions, have pretty clearly in mind demands to alleviate their grievances and they will readily organize and struggle. Considerable growth of mass organization is now taking place on various fronts. The A. F. of L. membership is expanding, the C.I.O. steel union has recently greatly increased its dues-paying membership, and other movements are also making

progress. But the tempo of this growth is quite inadequate to the urgent needs and unusual opportunities of the political situation.

Many weaknesses in recruiting new members into the democratic mass organizations operate to slow down their growth; such as (a) sheer neglect to take advantage of the favorable opportunity to secure new members, (b) failure to utilize new methods (radio, movies, plays, etc.) in membership campaigns, (c) reliance upon local bodies for spontaneous recruiting activities, instead of mobilizing the whole organization for determined membership drives, (d) failure to connect up recruiting with the economic and political struggles of the mass organizations. Behind all these weaknesses lies an underestimation of the increased role of organization in today's struggle against reaction.

The matter of systematically recruiting to enhance the strength of the mass organizations is a political-organizational task of basic significance. It is also one of complexity. The mass organizations have rich experiences in this work, which should be made available to each other. But this is seldom done. In membership recruitment Communists especially should strive to be experts and the most active workers.

4. ADMINISTRATION OF MASS ORGANIZATIONS

The fourth general group of important organizational tasks in building the democratic front turns around the administration of the mass organizations. Good administration is vital to the development of the offensive

and to all other phases of mass organization and struggle. Generally it is a field to which we have paid relatively little attention as yet, but one where the need for betterment in organizational practice is also urgent. Most mass organizations commonly use horse and buggy methods of management that would not be tolerated in employers' industrial organizations. Perhaps the worst offenders in this respect are the trade unions, especially the A. F. of L. craft unions.

There are glaring administrative evils and weaknesses in many of the people's mass organizations. In some there are bureaucracy, lack of democracy, excessive salaries for officials, extravagant financial systems, clique favoritism and nepotism. A common weakness is untrained and undisciplined organizing staffs and primitive systems of recruiting members. Other organizations neglect to attend to the special problems of Negroes, youth, women and national groups. Still others have stuffy official journals, dry-as-dust methods of mass agitation and absence of self-criticism. There is also much haphazard handling of workers' grievances, vest-pocket bookkeeping, and inadequate departmentalization. Such practices, most of which have their basis in political conservatism, should have no place in the toilers' ranks, as they enormously weaken the effectiveness of the mass organizations in every sphere of their activities.

It is a major responsibility of Communists to struggle against all these undermining influences in administration. Communists must be not only the best political analysts, program makers, mass agitators, organizers and

active leaders in the daily struggles, but also the most expert administrators in the day-to-day work of mass organizations. To make ourselves properly efficient in these matters will require double effort, because the experience of the Left wing in this country has been in the field of mass agitation and struggle rather than in that of administration. It is only in recent years, with the great extension of mass organization into various fields, that Communists in considerable numbers are occupying important leading official positions and are being charged with administrative tasks. We must, therefore, pay far closer attention to the matter of the administration of mass organizations than we have done in the past. Articles should be written and studies made, carefully analyzing the many complex problems in this vital sphere of organizational practice.

DANGERS IN THE WORK

In all our democratic front political and organizational work—stimulating the offensive, consolidating, recruiting, administering the mass organizations, and every other phase—success is contingent upon constant vigilance and upon our doing a vast amount of mass political education to combat the ever-present dangers of Right opportunism and sectarianism, as well as outright wrecking activities by Trotskyites and other agents of reaction.

Characteristic Right opportunist tendencies in the mass organizations are class collaborationism, careerism among leaders, underestimation of political action, Jim Crowism, Red-baiting and the cultivation of capital-

ist illusions. One harmful current variety of opportunism, which relates directly to the organizational theme of this article, is the common sluggishness of progressives in mobilizing the masses to support solidly their slogans. This happens time and again, in campaigns for peace, labor unity, labor legislation and other issues. Too much the sentiment prevails to "let Roosevelt and Lewis do it" by actions at the top, and too little the realization that even when the government administration and the trade union leadership favor certain measures it remains none the less necessary to counteract reactionary pressure and to put life into the people's demands by making a strong mobilization of the masses at the bottom to fight for them. This deficiency vastly reduces the power and achievements of the movement. In helping overcome such opportunist drifting tendencies, our Party has one of its biggest tasks.

Sectarianism shows itself among the mass organizations in various ways, among which are the parochial outlook of craft unionism, organizational particularism, the common trade union reluctance to develop close working relations with the farmers and professionals, isolationism on the peace question and general underestimation of the importance of international relations, neglect of the organization and demands of the youth, and many similar narrownesses. Trotskyites and Lovestoneites, under false flags of "radicalism," in their efforts to split and paralyze the people's movement, utilize Right opportunist and sectarian trends. Their recent attempt to split the Auto Workers Union emphasizes afresh

the danger that they constitute.

The history of the American class struggle, like that of all other countries, is saturated with the evil effects of Right opportunist and sectarian tendencies, which check the growth of class consciousness among the workers, weaken their economic and political organizations, and undermine their struggles. The progress of the democratic front, therefore, will be measured by the extent to which such negative influences are overcome, by the degree to which class consciousness is developed among the masses and a more progressive leadership grows up in the struggle against opportunism in its various forms, both Right and "Left," and to root out all Trotskyite-Lovestoneite wrecking. Here again, the Communist Party bears a great responsibility. With its Marxist-Leninist training and in its capacity as vanguard of the proletariat, it especially must know how to fight effectively against all such destructive tendencies in the broad mass movement.

IN CONCLUSION

Comrade Browder has repeatedly warned us that the struggle to organize the masses into the democratic front is a race against time, that immediate, broad, vigorous and intelligent action by the toilers is necessary if they are to head off the rapidly coalescing forces of reaction. This is a fundamental truth that must never be lost sight of. For the democratic front to win this historic race against time, upon whose outcome the fate of the people depends, it is imperative, not only that the volume of its political-organizational work be

increased, but especially that the quality be improved. In this article I have given an outline of the general organizational tasks of the democratic front and the broad lines along which the betterments in form and method should go—indications which at least serve to point out the main jobs before us and to indicate our Party's responsibility in their fulfillment.

The broad masses of workers, farmers, professionals and small tradesmen in this country want to fight against fascism. Our Party, as the vanguard of the proletariat, must know how to utilize skillfully its Marxist-Leninist training to give the masses the good theoretical understanding, solid organization, and effective fighting tactics necessary for victory.

Despite all the croakers of the Norman Thomas variety who try to get the masses to throw up the sponge; despite all the treachery of the counter-revolutionary Trotskyite-Lovestoneites; despite the repeated

sell-outs of the Chamberlains; despite the brutal assaults by the armed fascist powers—the democratic masses of the world are awakening politically, are consolidating their ranks and forging their way ahead in international struggle against the forces of reaction. The balance swings more and more to the side of the toiling masses fighting for peace, democracy and socialism, at whose head stands the mighty and invincible Soviet Union. In this growing world line-up of progressive forces the toilers of the United States are playing an increasingly important part. They are on the march and the times are auspicious for educating and solidly uniting them in vastly greater numbers. Improved methods of mass agitation, organization and struggle, which are indispensable to put into effect a sound political policy, are of fundamental importance in carrying out the historic role of their great democratic front.