

Mass line & revolutionary organizing

1. Welcome to the show - overview

- Why red mass work? –
 - Red mass work is our attempt as a group to take one of our main strengths—our commitment to the importance of work among the people, mass work—and better use that for the cause of socialist revolution! Not all the ideas that are behind red mass work are *new* ideas, but taken together they're an attempt to do mass work in a *new way*.
- *mass work* is a critical area of concentration for socialists, and that joining with and helping develop and lead the reform fights of the people is an essential part of how we will build a revolutionary movement for socialism.
- This is part of our Marxist inheritance...
 - The masses are the makers of history!
 - There are *objective forces in our society* that come to *understand their subjective position* as agents of change through struggle
 - class in itself transforming to a class *for* itself
- We do reform work to...
 - connect w the people
 - find other activists
 - improve our lives and the lives of our people
 - *and* because they are an important tactic in our long-term fight against our enemies
- So as socialists, we have longer term objectives and priorities when we do work too, and those are...
 - raising consciousness
 - building power
 - developing new fighters
 - offering a critique of this society *and*
 - articulating a vision in which we have power
 - we don't ask for the powerful to make changes; we are the ones with the power to change
 - base-building to develop headquarters of Left leadership
- Because we are in a struggle for power—because we know that without it our problems will always continue--we have to have a strategy that our work should be implementing for those reasons.
- **Questions: *Think about a campaign you've worked on before. Were you thinking about how it fit into a longer term fight for power? Was it just demanding something from people who have power—without actually trying to make them weaker and your forces stronger? How does thinking about it in that way change things?*** Responses from the audience to some of the questions & show hosts responses

2. The mass line: the way we do the work

- Method developed by the Communists in China using tools of Marxism:
 - took the ideas and experiences of the people—peasants, factory workers, women, students—and “systematized” them
 - developed their progressive impulses & insights
 - “gave them back” to the people as a line
 - i.e. the struggle against the landlords
- It’s not about us—the communists and revolutionaries—telling the people what to think. It’s about turning the *existing ideas of the people into a weapon against their enemies* – taking common experience and making it common struggle
 - Identifying the origins of the problem and experiences
 - thinking about history and the dynamics and forces that explain what’s happening
 - Connecting it to larger problems
 - locating it in our critique of society—white supremacist capitalism & patriarchy
 - Developing a plan to fix the problem
 - wining what can be won
 - *and* connect with a longer term struggle for power so we stop having so many problems in the first place
 - bringing out the strategic quality of the fight
- So first we need to hear our people & what they want to fight about. What’s happening? How many people are touched?
 - **Think about a campaign or issue you’ve organized on before. What were the ways you talked to the people who you were organizing? Were you able to do it systematically? How so? [Outreach, surveys, door knocking, meetings (“speak bitterness”), chat in the break room? Etc.]**
- Now we need to take what we’re hearing and make sense out of politically—as Marxists & revolutionary socialists—and think about how we can alleviate the immediate situation *and* connect with a longer term fight for power
- Start by *historicizing* the problem—researching it and analyzing it historically
 - The concrete history of the situation—not just abstract ideas
 - It’s important to understand the forces and dynamics that lead up to what’s going on
 - This takes study & research!
 - **Let’s think about that same campaign or organizing again. What’s its history? What are the dynamics in the community or workplace/economy that led up to it, and how are those connected to larger dynamics at play? Who made those happen? How would you answer the question “How did we end up here?” How specific are you able to be?**

- Now we should also think about explaining what's happening based on our critique of society (and deepen and develop our critique by incorporating our understanding of what's happening... theory-practice-theory...)
 - Because we think that *white supremacy/national oppression/racism* is the key to creating and ensuring bourgeois rule, we go into any struggle or moment with that on our mind
 - **Some questions to think about to do that: What are the racial dynamics at play that help explain this situation—and affect it? Who is affected—many people or specific oppressed nationalities? How does that change our understanding? Are there racial contradictions between people in the work? Etc.**
 - We also try and understand the gender & sexuality dynamics in the same way – using similarly conceived questions
 - Consider what's happening in the context of economic, political, and ecological crises
 - It's a lot to bear in mind but it's good to help us best understand how *what we're experiencing and fighting is produced by the systems in which we have no power*
 - Not every contradiction is as pronounced or central in any given situation – and our practice needs to reflect that
 - You don't have to work on every issue!
 - That's the work of a revolutionary movement
 - But we should be seeking to raise consciousness of our people, esp. advanced folks – toward the goal of “class consciousness,” i.e., helping transform a class “in” itself to a class “for” itself
 - And we should seek to build common ground and alliances with other forces
 - **Thinking about your example again, did you have a more systemic explanation and critique of what was happening? Did it impact the way you organized? How did you talk about it?**
- Through understanding the history of what's happening, and by thinking of the underlying systems that are being expressed, we can figure out where they fit into a larger fight for power.
 - systemic and grounded
 - understand that the systems reflect who does & who does not have power
 - This is also how we talk about our vision of society – one in which we have power
 - So we can take on the immediate...but connect it to the long-term
 - This isn't necessarily about coming up with slogans (though we could do that) but more about your understanding of the work and making sense of a situation to develop an approach to it

- And the understanding you promote in it
- It should inform demands
- But also demands often come from the people – and understanding how to fight for those in a way that advances the peoples’ interest and the position of our forces against the strategic enemies of our people *is the essence of the mass line*
- But as Marxists know *practice* is the criterion of what’s right or wrong
 - good ideas are not enough, they have to work!
 - We have to test the ideas we develop in this way
 - Are the people taking the ideas up? Are they mobilizing people?
 - Are they *working*?!
 - **What are some ways that you can “test” out ideas? How are we able to tell if the people are taking up our ideas, or if we have gotten it wrong? [Talk about what people are willing to do, and how deep they’re willing to go over the issue.]**
- So we’re
 - using dialectics & historical materialism
 - understanding of power
 - reliance on the people—the makers and breakers of history
 - to organize *differently* than just thinking about the problem right in front of them

3. Unite the many! – who with and where we do the work

- Just like in the united front, there are different forces with different relationships to what’s happening *internal to our fights*
 - That means that we have different ways of relating to and thinking about those forces as socialists
- Again we use both practice & theory/line to figure this out—not just one or the other
 - Advanced forces
 - Often (but not always) the most active
 - Best positioned to help cohere/lead the forces needed to make change
 - Doesn’t mean they’re always the best *public face*
 - Also already have the clearest ideas
 - Open to our ideas
 - But not always!...at first 😊
 - These can be *networks or groups of folks—i.e., custodians in your union*; or, they can be *individuals*
 - **What are some stories of advanced folks in work you’ve done before? Were there some people that surprised you?**
 - Intermediate forces
 - May have less clear ideas or convictions

- Not necessarily open to our ideas
 - Less able to cohere forces
 - But able to be cohered to something & can help implement a plan
- Backward forces
 - Can be undermining forces
 - Take a position against progressive line
 - They repeat the enemy's line and logic
 - Badmouthers
 - **What are some stories of backward forces you've interacted with?**
- We're always adapting our understanding of who the advanced, intermediate, and backward are because practice creates change in reality —and in people!
- We use that understanding to help:
 - Unite the advanced
 - Win over the intermediate
 - Isolate the backward
- Unite the advanced
 - Just like in the united front, their combined effort is what will cohere the broadest strata of people around a progressive vision
 - These are the forces most important to us *as socialists*
 - Consciousness raising
 - Strategic development
 - Winning to socialism / recruiting
 - Work with the advanced
 - Advanced actions
 - Can catalyze larger numbers of people
 - Summation
 - Struggling to understanding the situation with one another
 - Organizing to win over and lead the intermediate
 - Outmaneuvering the backward because of unity of vision and action
- Win over the intermediate
 - Antagonisms among the people –
 - We don't always like or see eye-to-eye with people we need
 - Mao distinguishes between “contradictions between the people and the enemy” and “contradictions between the people.”
 - Contradictions among the people
 - Should be treated differently than with the enemy
 - The people do not have the power to change the system that is creating the contradiction
 - Patience & forbearance
 - Strategic view

- Ugly ideas and prejudices can be challenged but will only go away when the social system that produces them goes away
 - When we have power... Which we need some of these forces on board to get
- ***Do you have a story about a time when you had to deal with a contradiction among the people? How did you? Were you successful?***
- This distinction is important because we have a strategic view toward uniting the many to defeat the few. If we write off everyone who doesn't agree with us 100%, we'll have few friends—and lots of enemies.
 - We shouldn't hide our beliefs
 - We should be principled and open
 - Clear about what unites us
- Another reason this is so important is that we are also trying to use these tools to make sense out of where people fit into a strategy for socialism. We need to be building base-areas among those folks who we understand to be the most advanced in terms of our struggle
 - We need headquarters of Left leadership
 - Those are our future hotbeds of revolutionaries and socialist leadership!
 - It means asking ourselves if we see the work we're doing actually connecting up with a movement for socialism
- ***Imagination exercise: Picture a mass movement for socialism with an active presence where you are—one that's really vying for power in the government, in the workplace. Do you see the folks who you're organizing with being connected to that movement? Who else do you see participating—in the mass demonstrations, the socialist political education schools, the socialist clinics and food programs?***
- This is what red mass work is! It's putting all our tools as Marxists and revolutionaries together to go out and organize the people—for immediate change and for revolution.