

Toward Revolutionary Mass Work (DISCUSSION OF THE 14TH PLENUM)

Becoming a Party OF the Workers

By I. AMTER

THE resolution of the 14th Plenum of the Central Committee contains a sentence that must be read and read by every Party member. "Thus the Party appears before the masses as a Party FOR the workers, but not the Party OF the workers." Just as the resolution poses once again the basic problems of the Party in the present period and tells the Party that the essential change has not been made; that we are still in the same groove, despite some successes in mass work; that we are still sectarian and have not made the sharp turn to mass work in the factories, among the unemployed, etc., so too this sentence must be read and understood, otherwise we will not make the turn in our work.

"A Party FOR the masses, but not the Party OF the masses." This is not only a question of how we speak to the workers—whether we address them as "they" in relation to ourselves. It is not only a question of whether we regard them as friends who can be won for the revolutionary movement, or as enemies. It is a question of our isolation from the masses—as a Party outside the masses, having little "direct personal contact" with the masses.

If we had this contact; if we talked the language of the masses as a result of the contact; if we knew what the masses were thinking and were willing to struggle for, as a result of voicing their immediate needs, we would not, in so many cases—yes, in most cases—formulate demands that do not rally the workers. We would not be abstract, but would be able to express the inmost desires of the particular groups of workers among whom we are working.

Some Experiences.

Why is this not the case? Because we are isolated from the masses. A clear example. Our Unemployed Councils work among huge masses of workers. This is not always organized contact, but daily touch with masses of workers. Our organization is very poor; we are not able to draw the workers into regular, systematic struggles. Some time ago we put forward the demand of \$25 a week for immediate relief, plus \$3 for each dependent. This did not help us to effect organization. We reduced the demand to \$15 plus \$3 for each dependent. This did not help us to move forward to better organization or struggle. Which was the correct demand? Certainly the workers are entitled to decent relief as a result of unemployment, for which

or \$15 was not too much—but the workers thought otherwise, for they were not moved. It is not the point here to discuss what the workers should demand—this has to be taken up with the workers. But it was obvious that something was wrong—and that was that we did not consult the workers; we did not thoroughly discuss the demands with the workers; we were not as a result able to formulate the demands that were OF the workers, not FOR the workers—and as a result they did not struggle as we should expect, in view of the tensity of the crisis, the militancy that the workers have shown, and the devotion and leadership that our comrades have furnished.

Or another example: In an important metal shop, employing several thousand workers, a shop nucleus has succeeded in building up a shop group of more than 70 members. This union group was able to influence the workers to some extent. Mass lay-offs began. Our bulletin dealt with lay-offs, but did not formulate definite action—nor did the union in any way take action. The union had several demands, but did not have sufficient daily personal contact with the workers, did not note the change in the situation when the lay-offs began, and when more thousands faced lay-offs. The result was that after a time our leaflets did not find the same response, the workers did not

believe that we intended or were able to take action, even though they believed that we were the things we lack in our work. This is what makes us yet a Party for the workers, but not the Party of the workers.

Or again the Negroes. In Harlem, the Party is isolated from the Negro workers. It is true that we talk to them in the Unemployed Councils, on the street corners. We have them in some of the industrial unions and leagues. But they are a group apart from the other workers. They believe that we can do something for them, not that they become a firm part of the Party and through the Party meet the demands of the workers at the particular time.

The proper approach; the understanding of the immediate needs of the workers concretely; the formulation of the demands not by ourselves but in direct consultation and discussion with the workers, so that the demands are the demands of the workers, not of the Party for the workers; the closest personal daily contact with the workers, which alone will enable us to formulate the immediate burning demands and make us the leaders in the struggle for them—these are the main shortcomings in our work. This is what makes us yet a Party for the workers, but not the Party of the workers.

With the 14th Plenum Resolution demands an immediate change in our work. This is the direct, basic work among the masses. To obtain this basis, and do this work, means an immediate, abrupt turn in our methods of work. This abolishes the need and use of letters and circulars. They have no meaning, since each situation must be taken up individually, personally. It puts an end to the bureaucratic method of making decisions without the workers. These decisions are empty, for they can only obstruct the work.

That our Party will grow into a mass Party by becoming the Party OF the masses, is clear. It is our task in carrying out the task set up by the 14th Plenum and the Communist International, to realize it in the shortest time possible. This is essential in view of the spontaneous struggle arising everywhere, the demonstrations of the unemployed against hunger. This is particularly demanded by the imminence of war against the Soviet Union, which will leave our Party merely declaiming against imperialist war, but unable to carry on the basic work in defense of the Soviet Union.

The demands of the 14th Plenum are imperative. Our Party must get down to work to fulfill them.

Against Routine--for Genuine Mass Work

The bureaucratic methods of work, which are expressed in the "circular letter" method of leadership and in an excessive number of paid functionaries at the head of the Party and the auxiliary organizations, paralyzes the work of the lower Party organizations, and sidetracks them from genuine mass work on to "inner" Party and routine work, and hinders the development of cadres and the initiative of the lower organizations. The Party has not yet established collective leadership or genuinely functioning apparatus in the lower organizations, and has the tendency to conduct the work only through individual organizers.

From the main resolution of the 14th Plenum of the C.P.U.S.A., printed in full in the April issue of the *COMMUNIST*.