
MASTERING BOLSHEVIK METHODS OF WORK*

BY EARL BROWDER

THE characteristic features of a Communist school are: to give the students an opportunity for more thorough knowledge and to prepare them for achieving even greater knowledge—all directed toward the task of mastering Bolshevism. The school, as Comrade Stalin has said many times, is only the preparatory stage: it must teach first of all—and I hope it has taught that to you—that you have not yet completely mastered Bolshevism after you have taken some of the first and most important steps to achieve that goal. Knowledge gained from books and schools is of the utmost significance; but it becomes a really important and serious fighting weapon only to the degree that you take the knowledge you have gained in school and make use of it out in the wide world, in the practical, every-day struggles of the people. Only to the degree that the ideas you are mastering in your studies become instruments for organizing and leading the great masses of the people—only to that degree has the school performed any serious function. And, it is outside the school, where you will not have the conditions of life very

carefully regulated for you, that the real test will come.

I was particularly interested to see how the school deals with the characterizations of the work of the individual comrades, and I am quite sure that this is one of the most important features of what you have learned here. I want to emphasize, however, that I don't think the characterizations that have been given are the last word or that they are correct in all details. But, when I see a group of serious comrades engaged in a common task, who have learned this fundamental prerequisite, to begin to formulate collective judgments based upon a very dispassionate and objective examination, as dispassionate and objective as we are able to make it, of the work of the particular comrades engaged in it, I know that however many mistakes there may be in the detailed judgments, the whole trend of such a collective evaluation is good and healthy. Out of it will come constantly greater precision and judgment—an increasing degree of objectivity and the dispassionate weighing of values.

One of the difficulties in welding together a Party organization as an efficient and powerful machine is to solve

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and overcome the problem of varying personalities, and to create the conditions for collective work. A recurrent obstacle in the way of achieving that is subjectivity—the individual feeling that he, the subject, is the beginning, the starting point, for his judgments; and that his particular problems and personality are the important thing to have under consideration. With such an approach we always exaggerate our own individual roles; and that is the greatest danger to our work. Sometimes, we exaggerate our own role by an inflated estimate of the positive contributions we make; at others, when we come to grief along that path, we retreat into an exaggerated self-criticism, which performs the same subjective function, by making us seem just as important in our negative features as we thought we were before in our positive contributions. What we want is the ability to face the questions that involve each one of us in our personal work, and to judge our own work with the same standards and the same precision that we would apply and want applied to everybody else. We must avoid or overcome the subjective approach, the feeling of sensitiveness in regard to critical examination.

In this respect, let me say a word about one of the contributions to our school work along this line, which has, in my opinion, been outstanding. We have had some very hard-working, loyal, well-equipped comrades helping you in your school. For several years now, I have been watching the development of our school work, and I don't think that it is too early to pass a certain judgment which I want to express here, about which I haven't

spoken for a long time, because I wanted to be absolutely sure that it really represented such an obvious truth that everybody would have to agree with it right away. It seems to me that the development of this self-critical estimation of all our work in our schools has been established largely by Comrade Mindel and is one of the most valuable contributions that has been made to the methods of work of our Party. I don't say that this is Comrade Mindel's invention; but it is Comrade Mindel's particular contribution that he showed us this vital aspect of Bolshevism better than anyone else who has been engaged in this type of work, and we should thank him for it. I think that those who have smarted most under Comrade Mindel's application of this principle are the very ones who will most heartily join me in my words of commendation.

COLLECTIVE WORK AND INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVE

Now, you are going out from the school back into a big, broad world. The question is: Has the school really equipped you for the problems you are going to face? I don't have to tell you that this world is a tough, hard place, and is getting tougher every day. You are not going into any paradise. As you all know, it is not going to be easy; and you are not going to find your problems solved for you so easily as they have been solved in this school. The problems are becoming ever more complicated, and if the people are to be successful in their struggle, a higher type of leadership will be required. As you know from your experiences in mass work, you

are going to have to pass some examinations in the world of practical work much more severe than you ever imagined here in the school. Each and every one of you will be put to the test.

What are the essentials that you should have equipped yourself with from this school to help you pass these tests more successfully? I would say two things above all: You must first have learned the absolute necessity of adapting yourselves as leading Party comrades to organized collective work, the multiplication of our powers by combined collective work. Of course, this is not something you learn all at once. To grasp the fundamental importance of this necessity, you will have to go much deeper into the problem of the development of the collective work of the Party and its leading institutions—collectivity which must reach ever-higher stages of development. At the same time, you must learn the second most important condition for successful work: You must learn to stand on your own feet and be able to solve problems even if you are standing absolutely alone. There is no contradiction between these two aspects of Bolshevik work. They are the two opposites which are the prerequisites for the unity of collective leadership. The supremacy of collective work does not at all mean the negation of the role of the individual. When you begin to achieve real collective work, only then will you see the real, whole development of the individual and the positive contribution that every individual makes; in this way every individual will be tested—not alone by his words, but by his contact with

the masses in their daily struggles, by his contribution in formulating the Party's policies and his ability to carry them through.

For, after all, we must remember, even though we are a growing Party, and even though we will get 100,000 members before the end of the year, our 100,000 members will be operating in a country of 130,000,000 population. Conditions in the country and in the world are becoming more and more pressing, and are demanding that leadership which it is our task to give, in order to direct the majority of the 130,000,000 on the path of democracy, peace, and, eventually, socialism. That means that our forces, if we are really going to get out among the masses, are going to be spread pretty thin. You will not be able to come together for a consultation with highly developed Communists on all the questions you are going to be confronted with. Certainly, you are not going to be able to call Jack Stachel in every time you are faced with a trade union problem! He works pretty hard, but he cannot do the physically impossible.

More and more you will have to develop the abilities to find the solutions and unite our forces along the right road without prolonged inner-Party discussions. Discussions are very good when it is possible to have them; but you must learn to find your way in the midst of mass struggles when quick decisions have to be made and consultation is impossible. There a new kind of test is put upon you, representing the collectivity of our Party forces; you stand there alone, and you must be capable of immediately giving the same answer with your own

unaided efforts that would be given if we could have a consultation of all the best minds of the Party. That is, you must represent the Party so well, and be grounded in our whole method of work and the conclusions that we have laid as the foundations for our work, that you can give the correct answer without any books, without any instructions, without any consultations, standing alone among great masses, engaged in the struggle—and not only give the correct answer, but know how to make that answer the answer that the masses will demand. Has our school helped you to face such tests as these? If the school has helped to prepare you for that kind of role—then the school has been successful.

ALERTNESS TO OUR MISTAKES
FOR THE BETTER PERFORMANCE
OF OUR TASKS

In applying to our own work in America the lessons of the experience of the much greater and more mature movement, our brother Party of the Soviet Union, we must study again and again Comrade Stalin's report to the plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, March 3, 1937: "Defects in Party Work and Measures for Liquidating the Trotskyites and Other Double-Dealers." It was published here in pamphlet form under the title *Mastering Bolshevism*.^{*} Let us learn to apply in our own work and in our approach to our own problems, what Comrade Stalin told the Communist Party of the Soviet Union it must do in facing the new stages of its strug-

gle, in wiping out the remnants of the enemy agents within the Soviet Union, the wrecking and spying bloc of Rights and Trotskyites—experiences that have a many-sided application to our own special circumstances and tasks in the United States. Especially, I want to stress one point that Comrade Stalin emphasized in that report. Comrade Stalin laid down the task of training cadres, training the leading personnel on the basis of a self-critical examination of their own mistakes. What does this mean? This is the very center of the whole process of self-criticism, the deepening of the mastery of Bolshevism by facing, combatting, and overcoming our own mistakes. This applies to the work of every individual, and especially to the collective work of every leading body that you may participate in. Comrade Stalin quoted a very profound paragraph from Lenin, which I want to read here as one of the leading thoughts that we all must keep before us at all times and in all of our work. Lenin said:

"The attitude of a political party toward its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest criteria of the seriousness of the party, and of how it fulfills, in *practice*, its obligations toward its class and toward the masses of working people. To admit a mistake openly, to disclose its reasons, to analyze the conditions which gave rise to it, to study attentively the means of correcting it—these are the signs of a serious party; this means the performance of its duties, this means educating and training the class and, subsequently, the masses." (Cited in *Mastering Bolshevism*, p. 49.)

To be alert to mistakes, to define them properly, to understand their causes and how to correct them, and

^{*} Joseph Stalin, *Mastering Bolshevism*, Workers Library Publishers, New York.

to do so in the full knowledge of all of the implications of the problem—this is what we are trying to accomplish in studying the essence of the methods of work based on the teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. Comrade Stalin said:

“It is only on this path, only by open and honest self-criticism, that Bolshevik cadres can be educated, that real Bolshevik leaders can be educated.”

TO LEAD THE MASSES WE MUST
LEARN FROM THEM

A further point that I want to emphasize on the basis of Comrade Stalin's report is that we not only lead and teach the masses, but that we must learn from the masses. This means, first, that we must not become conceited. Conceit is fatal; it immediately divorces us from the masses. When we speak of Bolshevik modesty, we mean that approach to the masses which dissolves all barriers between us and brings us closer to them; which causes them to trust us, to have confidence in us; and you cannot possibly approach the masses and receive this response of confidence and trust if you consider that your title or your position or your previous education, or anything in the world, gives you any special privilege in relation to the masses, or that it gives you any warrant for issuing instructions to the masses, for talking down to them.

Now, there is still in our ranks a great deal of this conceit, of Communist vanity, arrogance or presumption, this feeling that, “Oh, if only the Central Committee would just give me an appointment and a title, what wonderful things I could do among the masses!” Every time the

Central Committee runs up against that idea, we know that is precisely the instance calling for withholding any appointment or title. Anybody who depends upon an appointment or title from the Central Committee for work among the masses is not fitted to make the first steps for such work. And we in the Central Committee try to follow the policy of never giving an appointment or title to anybody until we are first assured that the person will not rely upon such appointment or title for his authority among the masses; because we know, the moment he begins to rely upon that, he is not going to extend the authority of our Party, but is going to break it down. He will be no good to the Central Committee; he will be a liability to us.

Secondly, in relation to the masses. In coming to the people with our program, we bring them something precious, something which they need. But to bring that program in a complete form, we must learn to adjust it to the particular needs of the workers to whom we are going, with the aim of jointly solving their problems. You have learned a great deal in this school, but when you get back to your own particular field of work, you are going to find that in none of the books you have read, nor in the lectures you have heard, was there any description of the special problem you are facing at that moment. And you are not going to be able to get the answer alone out of your own head, or your books, or your memory. Everything that you carry away from the school with you is going to help you only to the degree that you begin to tie up, very practically, simply, and

modestly what you have learned here with the knowledge of the masses among whom you are working, while learning from them.

You are not going to be able to teach those masses a thing of what you have learned in this school, unless you begin first by learning from the masses with whom you are working. You must learn what their problems are, how these problems must be approached, and then translate what you can apply from your previous practical mass work and your experience in the school into that situation in terms of the life of the people among whom you are working. You must learn from the masses before you can teach them anything, and this applies not only to the details of the situation; the masses will teach you many things in the course of your work in leading them, and if you are not able to learn those lessons which the masses will teach you, you will not be able to lead them successfully. You must make your ear very sensitive to what the masses say, not only to what they say at public meetings, because they do not always speak up at public meetings, but to what they say among themselves after the meetings, in their homes, and at the work bench. You must know what they really think, what they really feel, and adjust yourself to them—connect yourself up with them.

When you go into any phase of mass work, the first thing you have to appreciate much more than ever before is that the masses, the working class, and the broad toiling masses generally, are made up of many component parts, and that there is no formula that applies to the masses

as a whole. You have to find a particular approach to the most complicated differentiations among the masses. In the first place, we find as we go from industry to industry, the workers in the various industries present special characteristics that we must study and understand before we can do any serious, effective work in a particular industry.

Then, we find that running through the industries is another set of divisions—there are, for example, many national groups. These national groups are far from becoming less important, as used to be thought by some people who would predict that our national press, in the various languages, is something which is quickly going to die out. This is not at all the case. These nationalities and their influence do not disappear with the passing of the first generation of immigrants. The native-born American is about 35 per cent to 40 per cent, or perhaps more, first and second generations of these national immigrants, who still live in the tradition of their nationality, who still live in national communities, who still carry on their national traditions as Americans. They do not consider themselves at all people who are going back to the old country. They are Americans first, last and always, and never expect to be anything else, and are proud to be Americans. But, at the same time, they are also proud that they are Italian-Americans, or Polish-Americans, or German-Americans. And we have to study these special conditions of the particular sections of the masses and transform what at first seems like obstacles to our work into assets, into helping factors in our work. The mo-

ment we begin to understand the traditions, the atmosphere, the problems of the specific national group, this knowledge becomes an instrument that we can use to solidify our work and to root ourselves deeper among the masses.

This is likewise true as regards all the special aspects of our work among the masses: work with the youth; work among women; that especially important task that grows more important all the time—winning the Negro people; and all such problems which are the manifestation of the masses as you come in contact with them in the various industries and localities. You have to prepare yourselves to translate the general truths of Bolshevism that you got from your theoretical study into the practical answers of how to work among particular people in a particular place, by understanding every phase of their problems, everything that influences their thoughts, everything that influences their feeling, and to connect our program with their aspirations for a better life right where they are.

FOR THE MASTERY OF MATERIALIST DIALECTICS

What is this method of work that we are talking about? I have not taken any time at all to talk politics in the sense of examining some of the immediate, concrete problems of our country or of the world—and there are plenty of problems to talk about—because I think the limited time at our disposal here is most valuably used if we concentrate upon the method of work. The method of work of Communist leadership, the method of work of Bolshevism, is

what we are driving at all the time. The basis of this method of work arises out of our whole way of thinking. It is an expression of dialectical materialism. Now, I don't want to encourage you in the habit of going to trade union meetings to deliver lectures on dialectical materialism when the occasion doesn't call for it. I don't want to encourage you in the habit of taking a lot of the specialized philosophical language of dialectical materialism and sprinkling it mechanically through all your public speeches. You have to be especially careful that you make yourselves understood by the people to whom you are talking; but, also, if you are going to be very effective speakers to the masses, you yourselves must more and more understand, must more and more fully master the dialectical method and understand what you are doing, why you are doing it. Dialectics is the science of change, and everything that we do is aimed toward consciously directing the process of change. Our program, our ideas, do not come out of our own heads. That is why, when we speak philosophically, we combat very energetically idealist philosophies, which consider that the autonomous idea is the moving force in the world. Some people, even some very well educated people, and even some who call themselves Communists, think that when we oppose this idealist philosophy, we are fighting against all manifestations of what is popularly known as idealism, that is, devotion to ideals, devotion to program, devotion to impersonal ends. That is a grave mistake. We are opposed to idealist philosophy precisely because we have found a

much surer foundation and instrument for the pursuit of our ends—the realization of the devotion to our ideals by recognizing that these ideals are not the absolute ends that rule the world, but that they are themselves the product of the struggle of great social forces, and become the instruments of the struggle, the class struggle, the development of society—that all ideas are related to and expressed in this struggle, and that by understanding the foundations, the moving forces, we become the masters of the idea, of thought, as weapons in the class struggle.

Instead of being the passive adherents of thought and ideas, we achieve mastery over them, and this mastery is the mastery of dialectical materialism as established by Marx and Engels, and further developed by Lenin and Stalin. It is because we have begun to master Bolshevism, to master materialist dialectics, that we have been able to isolate and defeat all those enemies of the working class, who have tried to divert, disrupt, and demoralize our movement from within—the Trotskyite-Lovestoneite gang, who have become the agents of fascism. They try to operate with “Left”-sounding slogans and phrases, but they have very little success. There is not the slightest doubt that they would have done a hundred-fold more damage, if we had not had a Party sufficiently equipped with the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism, to be able to reach the masses and to show them the deeper truths underlying the confusing surface of events and political life today. Because we were able to penetrate deeper into the problems, to see

further into the future, we have established an influence among the masses radiating from our Party, that even our enemies must recognize. We have become one of the most potent influences upon the thought currents and political trends of the American people today. What gives us that far-reaching power of influencing thought is our mastery of Marxism-Leninism. Our specialized shock-troop enemies, the Lovestoneites and Trotskyites, refuse to speak of us with any other label today than that of “Stalinites”; they claim not to recognize that we are Communists, that we are Marxists, or Engelsists, or Leninists: we are only “Stalinists.” But this label that is thrown against us as a term of derision we have learned to appropriate as a proud name, and we are glad to call ourselves Stalinists.

We have learned that among people who are influenced by, or respond to, political ideas, we can make a fundamental judgment of a person's political character, if he is at all informed or widely read, by his reactions toward Stalin. Anyone who is politically literate, who reads the current literature, who is informed about world affairs, and yet at the same time gives a negative reaction to Stalin—that person is moving towards, or is under the influence of, fascist ideologies. For even, in the case of a simple, honest democrat today, who has not the slightest inclination toward or sympathy with Communism, his interest in preserving democracy and peace, in the established facts of the power of the Soviet Union, with Stalin at its head, as the fortress for the preservation of democracy and peace in the world, necessitates, if that man is

an honest democrat, a positive reaction toward Stalin and Stalin's role. And as for those who go far beyond the simple, honest democrat, beyond the simple preservation of peace and democracy, who look forward to the guaranteeing of peace and democracy and the deepening of democracy to embrace all the phases of life; for those who look forward to the development, through the preservation of democracy and peace, toward the future socialist society—for all such people, if they are possessed of integrity, there can be only the reaction of the deepest respect, admiration, and love for the tremendous world-changing achievements that have been brought about by Stalin's leadership, and, therefore, for the personality of Stalin himself, as our most beloved guide and leader.

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These are some of the important thoughts I wanted to express on this day of your graduation, to try to emphasize somewhat the direction of the whole course of study. We find ourselves in a world menaced by reaction and fascism, a world threatened with

upheavals and counter-revolution, a world thrown into chaos by the rapid disintegration of the capitalist order of society, a world beset by the most complicated and difficult problems that are constantly becoming more complicated and more difficult; a world which at the same time, however, presents us more and more with the forces ripening for our program and for our leadership, increasingly responding to us, giving us the foundations upon which, and the instruments by means of which, all of these problems can be solved. The key to that solution is the steadily rising capacity of our own Party, of our own leading people; our constantly increased abilities and capacities, our constantly deepening understanding of our problems. Given this increased capacity on the part of our Party cadres, our Party leadership, spreading it more and more throughout our Party membership, and from them to the masses—given this increasing mastery of Bolshevism, we are going to organize the majority of the American people, and we are going to place our country firmly in the vanguard of world progress and world socialism.