

To the Tribune of the People Editorial Board

June 21, 2021

Struggle Sessions Editorial Board

Dear Tribune Editors,

Thank you for sending us the letter of criticism from a Tribune reader. We have already found it useful in solidifying our own political line and our understanding of the role of the revolutionary newspaper, as well as its relationship to a theoretical journal such as Struggle Sessions. We have reached unity on a number of points regarding the letter of criticism and will be using this to send advice and criticisms and revision suggestions to your paper on a rolling basis. On a more immediate note, we wish to write to you regarding broader points of unity with the letter of criticism--in doing so, we hope to contribute to and further the discussion and two-line struggle rather than simply re-iterate or throw our weight behind the contents of the letter of criticism.

We see the Tribune as evolving into the central organ of the US proletariat, and we have looked to the Tribune as a model in our own reorientation in the last few months. Our commentary here is intended as a theoretical intervention on the current two-line struggle, demarcating between right and wrong and strengthening the Tribune by promoting the left line overcoming the right internally.

The author of the letter writes that there is a problem of both orientation and political line evident in Tribune lately; we agree and see this as a unity, where orientation both flows from and influences line. By orientation we mean the answers, in practice, to the two questions: *who are our friends, who are our enemies?* and *to which masses do we go?* You have identified a rushed style of work as a contributing factor in the dual error of orientation and political line, and to fix this you have begun spreading out publication of articles over the week and asking for criticism and input from friendly organizations and Tribune Support Committees, and this seems correct, but alone it would only be dealing with a side factor or dealing with an epiphenomenon. There seems to be a careless attitude taken towards the political work of Tribune, not from lack of time but from lack of consideration of the role of the revolutionary newspaper.

As we see it, the central question flowing from the two questions above is this: what are you trying to tell people, and to which people are you trying to tell it? This means seriously considering what political work, what agitation and propaganda work the revolutionary newspaper ought to do. Your own memo on agitation and propaganda puts it well, paraphrasing Lenin: link what people already know to what they need to know. This means determining what people already know while simultaneously determining what they need to know: orientation and line. This is identical to the basic process of the mass line: differentiating the masses into the relatively advanced, intermediate and backwards, and uniting the advanced while raising the intermediate and winning over the backwards, recognizing that masses are grouped according to class interests and refusing to oppose "classes and masses". This process, along with the political demarcation between friends and enemies, should be the guiding thread in all of the work of the Tribune: this is what it means to provide ideological leadership. Instead,

Tribune at times seems to orient not towards the broad masses but towards a closed circle of already-initiated activists, seemingly hoping that this circle will shoulder the burden of bringing the political line to the masses.

What is at stake is the very concept and realization of the revolutionary newspaper: let us take up Lenin and recognize that the paper is the collective organizer which intervenes in the real movement with tactical and strategic advice, raising political slogans which express the interests of the proletariat, and giving correct and timely guidance to the working class and the broad masses every step of the way. It needs to win the confidence of the masses in their millions over the course of this re-iterative intervention into the real movement. It acts as collective organizer through providing ideological leadership. It must take the ideas already existing in the real movement divided between advanced, intermediate and backwards and bring to them a proletarian political line. We reiterate "the real movement" because it seems that some of your recent editorials in particular have been written about the workers rather than written to the workers.

From the position of a correct orientation (to the broad masses, differentiated between advanced, intermediate and backwards) and correct political line (based in the ideology of the proletariat applied to concrete conditions) a clear through-line guiding each article must be developed. We see a lack of clear through-line or thesis statement in some articles as the reason for some of the errors pointed out in the criticism. Every article should do one thing and do it well, should answer a pressing question garnered from the mass movement, for instance, as simply as possible, or should present a question which isn't yet being considered by the people but which ought to be.

Consider what is the thesis statement of each news story, editorial, opinion piece. What is it you want to teach at that moment? What needs to be taught, when no one else will teach it? It can be as simple as a worker's correspondent exposing dangerous conditions in a workplace that no one else would expose, or as complex as an article that argues that it was the organized power of the bourgeoisie, the ruling class, that defeated the Bessemer Alabama union drive, and not the vagaries of "workplace democracy" or some form of "corruption" as the revisionists allege. Taken all together, these articles would add up to a political intervention, based in the ideology of the proletariat, into the real movement. This sort of planned and systematic intervention avoids the joint problem of tailism and adventurism, the empty verbiage used to cover up a vacillating and uncertain political line.

There must be a unity within each piece, as well as unity across the paper as a whole. News articles are the main work of the paper and should present the truth in a partisan way. Editorials are written about the news, building off of the news articles and not substituting for them. We see too much editorializing and not enough presentation of the news from a class standpoint within the Tribune.

For instance, in the paper's coverage of the recent struggle in Palestine, there was only one article written about the events themselves which, although not authored by the Editorial Board, was written more like an editorial than a regular news story. Besides this the only coverage of the struggle was of solidarity events. How much stronger would it have been if there were several news stories covering the development of the struggle, on top of which was a strong editorial presenting a clear political line on the question? The Tribune should not see itself as riding on the coattails of the monopoly media, but as covering all struggles of the people and providing, through this coverage, a proletarian political line.

Editorials should set out to answer concrete questions already posed by the masses. They should not be seen as theoretical essays but principally as propaganda, something which serves the key directive in operationalizing the mass line as outlined above. Taking the correct orientation means seeing your readers mainly as those who have never heard of Maoism or read your paper before, and so explaining everything that isn't common knowledge. As propaganda, editorials should speak to the masses directly, and not speak about them as if they are an object of study.

We see this as the root of the long-winded empty verbiage, striking a pose and shooting at random in certain articles, with meaningless images like "the horizon is quaking" and blatantly absurd lines like that every child of the working class is nothing more than a target, and with vague pronouncements like "We cannot let opportunists deceive the people" which do nothing to educate the people on what opportunism is and does concretely, and why and how it should be opposed. Lacking political substance, that is, lacking a through-line rooted in a concretely defined political line and orientation, pieces inevitably fall into subjectivism. We reiterate our above point: editorials should answer burning questions already posed by the mass movement, and should answer them to the very people who are asking them.

We point you to *Rectify the Party's Style of Work* where Mao lays it out succinctly:

"What kind of theorists do we want? We want theorists who can, in accordance with the Marxist-Leninist stand, viewpoint and method, correctly interpret the practical problems arising in the course of history and revolution and give scientific explanations and theoretical elucidations of China's economic, political, military, cultural and other problems. Such are the theorists we want. To be a theorist of this kind, a person must have a true grasp of the essence of Marxism-Leninism, of the Marxist-Leninist stand, viewpoint and method and of the theories of Lenin and Stalin on the colonial revolution and the Chinese revolution, and he must be able to apply them in a penetrating and scientific analysis of China's practical problems and discover the laws of development of these problems."

The whole text as well as *Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing* is a gold mine for those who wish to be revolutionary theorists, for those who want to understand and solve the problems of revolution in the USA. We see subjectivism and sectarianism cropping up in the production of the Tribune, and it is expressed in the stereotyped party writing of many of the recent editorials.

We note that two parenthetical comments were included in the letter which seem to be from the Editorial Board itself; we take this as either intentional or a Freudian slip and engage with it as part of your response to the letter and part of your appeal for criticism and aid.

First, we read these comments as defensive and indicative that you do not fully unite with the contents of the letter of criticism; that is fine, as desired unity passes through struggle to real unity and that is a process which unfolds over time. However, unity should not be presumed or made into something purely formal or overly-simplified—we see your response as primarily a deflection. For instance, concerning the use of first names such as for Garrett Foster, it is not about "earning the right" to speak familiarly about anyone, but instead about taking a stand for professionalism. The voice of the Tribune, in its news articles and editorials, is that of a newspaper seeking to represent the entire US working class. Some writers might have personal familiarity with people like Garrett Foster, but to break from

the impersonal voice of a newspaper, beyond being unprofessional, makes the paper speak not as the voice of the working class but the voice of a number of activists in one location.

Turning to the "Week in Struggle" section of your paper, we ask that you take a closer look at the criticisms raised in the letter and not chalk them up to spelling out acronyms or giving a basic run-down of where X or Y group is, or what each group does generally. Look back at the first Week in Struggle publications; they all had a reason to exist, something they were trying to get across, and this was tied into the general orientation of the paper at the time—graffitied slogans around the economic and Covid crisis, news blurbs about rent strikes related to said crisis, all within the context of the paper publishing articles and editorials explaining the meaning of the crisis and putting forward what to do about it. We do not see this now. Week In Struggle posts now seem to be more "shout-outs" to friendly organizations rather than evidence of concrete struggle actively happening connected to the main issues the paper is already reporting on. What does it mean to your readers to know that an educational event about a Mexican revolutionary was held in Bremen, or that activists in Copenhagen handed out leaflets supporting Palestinian Liberation? This is not an argument for localism but for making precise political decisions—the Tribune is not a website like Dem Volke Dienen, and should ensure that all information publicized serves the cohesive development of a political line.

Compare this with the way that AND publishes its material similar to "Week in Struggle." They are thematic and explanatory but also simple, relying on the rest of the paper to support, say, the dozen photographs of slogans and banners about vaccines for the people which they publish.

To summarize, Tribune of the People must deal with everyday questions from the standpoint of revolution and the conquest of power by the proletariat. The paper must take the scattered ideas of the masses, generated from the spontaneous struggle, and systematize them into clear propaganda based in Marxism. The goal of the newspaper should be seen primarily as presenting the news on a partisan basis. Rooted in the twin issues of orientation and political line, every article must develop on the basis of a clear through-line, a substantive argument based in answering the burning questions emerging out of the struggles of the masses. The principal questions are to demarcate between friends and enemies, and to differentiate between advanced, intermediate and backwards among the masses and to engage with each along the correct principle. This is how the newspaper becomes the collective organizer, the central organ of the proletariat—through providing ideological leadership to the class struggle, bringing a proletarian political line to the mass movements.

Fraternally,  
Struggle Sessions Editorial Board