

A combination of overt and covert methods of doing workers' work

Editor's note: The comrades who went to the workers brought us good experience about workers' organisational work. They developed mass organisation in the factories. By using the legal organisations in the factories to actually develop their own semi-peripheral organisations, they were able to combine them with the masses, giving the clandestine revolutionary organisations strength and greater potential for development, and were able to develop their own forces from the legal mass organisations and semi-peripheral organisations, and provided the conditions for the training of workers' revolutionaries from these organisations. It also gives the mass movement the potential for further development and is an opportunity for us to push the mass movement in the direction of a political movement.

Main article:

I have had a period of experience of melting work¹. A few friends invited me to go with them. I would like to share some experience of this time.

First, the beginning: the starting state of work in the factory

There were six of us, and the place where we melted was a medium to large electronics factory. The factory occupies an exclusive park with several buildings. The number of workers in the factory fluctuates a lot because of the different peak seasons; in the peak season, when there are many workers, there are roughly 5,000 workers, and in the off-season, when there are fewer workers, there are only 3,000 or so. General labourers work two shifts, with the day shift running from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and the night shift running from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. The workers sign formal contracts and work in accordance with labour laws. Employees sign formal contracts and are paid overtime in accordance with the labour law, with one day off a week in low season and one day off a month in high season.

The six of us who came into the factory all worked as operators, and one of them quickly became a multi-skilled worker. Anyone who has worked as a labourer knows that operators have a very limited social network, while multi-skilled workers have a much easier time opening up their social circle due to their position. None of us were on the same production line, and there were six of us on four floors. In addition, we have all moved to one shift, otherwise we would have difficulty in having high-frequency meetings.

For the first two months, our work was going well. We chatted happily with the workers in front of and behind us on the assembly line, and when the line manager came, he would only say a few words to us, so it was not a big deal. We heard a lot of stories from the workers, including stories of female workers who were subjected to gender discrimination in the countryside, stories of workers who were injured at work, stories of workers who were beaten up by the triads, stories of workers who managed to get the wages owed to them by filing a complaint on their own, and stories of workers who were united in spontaneous struggles. Workers tell their stories and we tell our own stories, and we soon become friends.

By the third month, we had a bottleneck. We had reached out to as many workers as we could on the job. The assembly line was so long and the workload was so heavy and intense that it was hard to leave the line to go to other places. Occasionally there are breaks, but they are short. These are the only people in the vicinity of an assembly line, and since they are pinned to the line and can't get

¹ This is a relatively new expression. In Chinese it is 融工. It refers to a particular type of mass work where a student enters a factory to "melt" in with the workers and build revolutionary organisation.

away, the number of friends they can make is limited. An operator is lucky if he can make ten or so workmates.

In the past two months, we have got to know 30 to 40 workers, and we have talked to about 10 of them. We cared about their lives and helped them in any way we could when they needed help, such as moving house. However, very few of these workers have an obvious spirit of struggle and are interested in rights and so on. We tried to pick out seedlings² for the study, but the base was so small that we couldn't pick out many of them. We tried to organise a study session once and chose a few potential candidates, but when the time came, only one worker came, and the scene was so weird that it turned into several of us accompanying one person, which one of our own people later jokingly described as "accompanying the prince to study".

There is something even worse, that is, the great mobility of workers. Workers in electronics factories are very mobile. They work here one month and then change factories the next. It's not easy to build up a connection, but it's just like that. People come and go, and in a year the factory can have more than one change of personnel.

The paradox of reality is that we have to change the way we work, to find a way to get to know more people, to pick from a larger pool, to overcome the mobility of the workforce with a larger base of people, etc. In the past, we used to get to know the workers in a different way, and then we had to change the way we worked.

In the past, there was only one way for us to get to know workers: we relied on our own circle to make friends, and then let friends bring their friends. The scope of such acquaintance is very limited, and it is difficult to know others across production lines, floors and buildings. We must break away from this backward handicraft model, and we can no longer rely on this handicraft way of getting to know people.

II. Transformation: transforming working methods and establishing legitimate organisations

What to do? Real life has given us great inspiration. On a certain day off, when we were walking on the street, we came across a group of people skating, wearing uniform cultural shirts, which were very cool. Seeing me watching from the roadside, one of the skaters came over to advertise, "We are the XX Roller Derby Team, if you are interested in roller derby, you can join us". I took advantage of the situation to chat with him and found out that he was also a labourer in the factory next to ours. As a matter of fact, the area where we are located is a large industrial park with a lot of amenities, and there are many spontaneous interest groups formed by the workers, such as street dance groups, long-distance running teams, basketball teams, and so on. The spare time life of workers is boring, except for playing Douyin³, watching live broadcasts and playing games, there are not many projects. However, some interest and recreation groups in the vicinity of industrial areas provide a lot of convenience to workers. We have seen these interest groups before, but we didn't pay much attention to them. Recently, we have been thinking about how to get to know more people, and this has inspired us.

We seized this opportunity to set up a roller-skating team, and we brought in all the workers we knew, and there were several dozens of people in the group. We told the workers in the group that they could bring in all the workers they knew who were interested or wanted to join. We also used a number of techniques to promote the roller skating team. For example, many workers are single and

² Inexperienced new recruits.

³ Playing, or "brushing" Douyin refers to liking and forwarding posts on social media. Douyin is the origin of the internationally available Tik Tok.

want to meet someone, so we tell them that they can make friends in the skating group, and so on. Of course, we also forbid all the naughty chats, which are not allowed.

We were very well prepared for the first activity. We were afraid that people would not know how to skate, so we called on our friends from the roller skating team to teach them in advance. During the weekend, we made a notice in advance for the workers in the group to take over the skating. The first activity was a great success. We learnt and chatted at the same time, introduced ourselves to each other and made many new friends.

In this way, we have a new collective that accepts workers. In this collective, we not only organise activities, but also communicate more about our lives and our own situations. Chatting and mingling online and meeting offline, we soon formed a more united and friendly situation, and the centripetal force of the whole group was strengthened. On different assembly lines in the factory, workers who did not know each other before or even had never met each other now often meet and greet each other and chat together during breaks.

God helps those who help themselves. While we were actively exploring, good news came to us. There was originally a welfare group in our factory, which usually did not do anything but give out benefits during the New Year holidays and organise parties at the end of the year to bring in strong men to perform in various workshops. There was a key member of our skating team whose wife knew people in the welfare group. We discussed with his wife to ask her to help us contact the person in charge of the welfare team to see if we could attach our skating team to the welfare team.

The result was very smooth, and the welfare group welcomed us. Why? Because the factory pays low wages and the mobility of workers is high, the factory asked the welfare team to organise activities to attract workers and reduce their mobility. We wanted to do activities, and they also wanted to do activities, so they attached us to the group, and we would organise and arrange the activities without their interference, and we would take photos of our activities for them, and they would report them to the factory for political achievements.

After we became affiliated with the Welfare Group, our activities were greatly expanded. First of all, the welfare group helped us to buy 30 pairs of roller skates, which was very useful to us. Before, many workers wanted to come and play, but they were reluctant to buy the shoes because they were afraid of the money, but now they don't have to worry about that. Secondly, in the past we could only spread the word by word of mouth, but after we became affiliated with the Welfare Group, we were able to print out posters and flyers saying, "xx Factory Roller Derby Team is recruiting new members, all free of charge"! The QR code was attached to the poster and posted on the welfare team's bulletin board, and the welfare team also asked the supervisors and line managers on each floor to help us spread the word.

In the past, we relied on our small circle of friends to meet people, which was a handicraft way and very slow. Now, we put up posters directly and use the welfare team to get line managers to help us publicise, which is a big industry approach, and the efficiency of getting to know people has increased significantly. In the past, we could only get in touch with 20 to 30 people in a month or two, but now, when we put up a poster, we can quickly add 200 to 300 people to our group, and 40 to 50 people can come to an event.

With the Roller Derby team, we greatly expanded our work over the next two months or so. Firstly, the number of people in the group exceeded 500. Secondly, we were able to attract 40 to 50 people to each activity. Thirdly, we were able to get to know workers with a sense of their rights and experience in fighting for them through our activities.

I would like to say a few more words here. The purpose of roller skating is not to have fun, but to expand our acquaintances and break through the limitations imposed by production lines, floors and buildings. The people we meet through rollerblading will quickly move on to other relationships, for example, we can call each other out for late-night snacks and chats on weeknights, and we can call each other out for cooking and shopping on weekends, and so on. In the process, we continue to make friends with the workers, chatting and talking with them, and secretly observing their situation and selecting possible candidates for training.

We divided the skating team into several teams, and we let four of our own comrades plus a few key workers to be the leaders or vice leaders of the skating teams, to help organise activities and weekend gatherings, etc.

We make active use of this group not only to organise activities and talk about life, but also to do some things to help workers and coordinate some conflicts. The number of workers close to us has greatly expanded. In the process, we screened a lot of workers, recorded all those who had the will and potential to fight, and those who were partially aware, and systematically chatted with them to talk about their feelings. At this time, we tended to talk about things related to the struggle, to see whether they dared to fight, whether they had any experience in the struggle, and so on.

In this process, we picked out some good seedlings and relied on them to form another organisation, which had two requirements. The first requirement was confidentiality, which was recognised by the workers. After all, they all knew that we could not let the factory know that we were talking about these topics and studying these contents. The second requirement was to conduct studies, to exchange various kinds of struggle experiences, and to instil socialist consciousness to a moderate extent, but not to a predominant degree, because the group of workers with a sense of struggle had not yet reached a higher level, and we also needed to further examine whether they could maintain confidentiality and discipline, and we could not hastily tell them that we wanted to start a revolution before then.

The first part is legal work. We organised a workers' interest group, which was attached to the factory's welfare team and appeared in a legal form. We do not demand any confidentiality from the workers in this group, and we do not talk about revolutionary things in the public activities of this group, because every word we say may be unconsciously spread by the workers. This group is unable to demand any secrecy from the workers, and therefore it is bound to appear legal (i.e. not revolutionary). However, this group is extremely important. It is an important channel for us to get to know the workers on a broad scale, it helps us to break through the narrow confines of our own circle and the circle of the workers, it allows us to break through the artisanal way of getting to know the workers, to get to know them on a large scale in a large industrial way, and from there we can transfer seedlings for examination, and then transfer those who are suitable for the clandestine work.

The second part is the secret work. This secret work formally demands discipline and confidentiality from the workers and is accepted by them. This is in contrast to the open group where demands cannot be made. This "contrast" was also used to educate the workers about discipline and confidentiality. Workers who have been tested by the organisation of large-scale industrial production are generally unambiguous here. In this clandestine workspace, we continue to select and train workers who better meet our requirements and who are able to further their study and acceptance of Marxism-Leninism.

III. Summary: the significance of open work

Firstly, the legal form can hide and protect us. Whenever dozens of people gather in an industrial area, if they do not have a name (they do not have to be registered, but they must have a name), they will easily attract attention. There are various departments in the industrial area that keep an eye on the gathering of people, and once they gather together, they will either be questioned immediately, or they will be noticed and reported to the police. How can we gather a large number of people without attracting unwanted attention? We need to package our gatherings in a way that the other side approves of or does not object to, such as forming a roller derby team. In this way, we have the name of a large-scale gathering of workers and the possibility of getting to know them on a large scale. This is a form of de facto legality. Legitimacy hides us from mass organisations and helps us to expand the scope of our work.

Secondly, legitimacy can help us expand our contact with the masses. If we only rely on our friends in the neighbourhood, we can only form a very narrow circle of relations, and we will not even be able to find seedlings that can be nurtured through this circle. Of course, if we are lucky, we may come across one or two workers who have the will to fight, or one or two workers who are full of passion. But the probability is very low. Our work should not be based on such low probability of chance, but on the establishment of channels to get to know the masses on a wide scale. In order to get to know the masses widely, you have to make a lot of noise and publicity. If you have to make a lot of noise and publicity, this group cannot appear as a revolutionary group, but can only appear as a legitimate group.

Finally, the form of legality is a necessary expression of the combination of overt and covert work. The form of legitimacy in the context of this paper refers to a situation in which a mass organisation, in which we cannot demand secrecy from the masses, in which it is not possible to speak of revolution, or even of economic struggle, must necessarily take on a form of legitimacy, or even of harmony. Therefore, it must show a legitimate face, or even a harmonious face. All interest-based mass organisations are legitimate in this way.

Therefore, whether or not it is officially registered is not a criterion for the form of legality in this paper. Our roller derby team was not registered at the beginning of its existence, but we were able to recruit workers under this name, which is a form of legality. It was easier for us to get to know people in this form, and when we met in this form, we did not attract unnecessary attention and suppression. Later on, we put it under the name of the welfare group and did not go through any registration procedures. The core of the legal form mentioned in this paper is that the group does not engage in direct confrontation with the government, and does not outwardly aim at confrontation as the purpose of its existence.