Introduction

Below are excerpts from a reading packet put together by the political education committee of Bring the Ruckus (BTR) in 2008 to grapple with the question of revolutionary organization in the 21st century. The readings and questions were compiled for members of Bring the Ruckus and reflect some of the questions the organization was grappling with at the time. To give some context, BTR was a revolutionary group founded in 2001 which democratically disbanded in 2012. During that time, BTR had locals in various cities, all doing political work around six themes. The political work members engaged in 1) must address systems that attack working class people of color, 2) must attack white supremacy, 3) must have the potential to further the development of revolutionary consciousness among the working class, 4) must have the potential to build a dual power, 5) must actively push the development of a feminist praxis, and 6) should stretch the boundaries of political organizing. If a struggle does not meet these criteria, members would have a difficult time persuading other members that they should be involved in it. The writings here include internal dialogues about cadre organizing, along with readings that present ideas on revolutionary organizations.

Note that the documents included in this packet are historical, meant to provide context and not intended as a final word on what a cadre is or should be. Rather, the intention is to foster debate, dialogue, and ruthless (principled) critique that might lead to the advancement of political work in the streets and in the home.

To be clear: Cadre organizations are not designed to be loose networks. Rather, cadres adopt an organizational structure designed to intervene, organize, support, and pounce during the most vital and integral moments, with a collective strategy and with eyes on the prize.

As you know, we are in a unique political climate in 2025 with an unfortunate but oddly beneficial opportunity for revolutionary development and action. These readings are shared mainly for those interested in both studying and forming cadre organizations in the current moment.

Below are a series of discussion questions for groups interested in learning about cadre organizations. Note that the readings in this document do not provide all the answers to the questions. Rather, the questions are meant for broader discussion, with some of them linking directly to the readings.

READINGS

The Bring the Ruckus Statement

The 2008 Political Education Report

Joel Olson's "What Is a Cadre Organization?"

Selections from the Bring the Ruckus Revolutionary Organizing Notebook

Sojourner Truth Organization, "Toward a Revolutionary Organization," pg. 25-36

Questions:

1. What defines a "cadre revolutionary organization" as distinct from mass movements or political parties?
2. Why might a revolutionary group choose to organize around a small group of dedicated cadres rather than seek mass membership from the outset?
3. What is the role of political education and ideological training in cadre organizations?
4. What role do cadre play in revolutionary moments or crises? How are they expected to lead or act differently than general supporters?
5. What are some common criticisms of cadre revolutionary organizations—both from outside and within the left?
6. What is the importance of ideological clarity and internal political education within cadre organizations?
7. In Olson’s view, how should cadre organizations relate to broader movements, uprisings, or spontaneous political moments?
8. What does it mean to have “commitment” in the context of revolutionary organization?
9. What is the relationship between individual commitment and collective discipline?
10. How does dissent, disagreement, or personal transformation function within the framework of commitment?
11. How do organizations foster deep commitment and protect from authoritarian or closed organizational practices?

Bring the Ruckus

By the Ruckus Collective,Phoenix, 2001

Over the last few years there has been a growing discussion among revolutionaries of the need for a national or continental anti-authoritarian revolutionary organization. This discussion has emerged from several contexts, including the death of the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation, the anti-globalization protests that began in Seattle in 1999, and by criticisms of the whiteness of the American left made primarily by revolutionaries of color. World and national events also seem to justify such discussion: globalization, the persistence of the American racial order, and the bankruptcy of reformist movements from the left, right, and center. Yet if talk about the need for a new organization is abundant, steps toward building it have been awkward. Much talk is simply recycled debate over violence and organizational structure, while other debates, such as over strategy, have been largely overlooked.

It is with the intention of furthering debate about a new revolutionary organization that this document was written. The Ruckus collective (no relation to the Ruckus Society) formed in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1997 to discuss revolutionary politics at a local and national level and to develop a revolutionary praxis. Our main contribution locally has been the creation of Phoenix Copwatch, which has been patrolling the streets since early 1999. Several months ago we began talking about the need for a national or continental revolutionary organization. This led us to embark on a program of study with the goal of creating a proposal for a membership-based national or continental revolutionary federation. During this time we studied a number of past revolutionary groups, focusing particularly on their politics, program, structure, and strategy.

The principles outlined below express the conclusions we have reached so far in our study. This is by no means a complete manifesto or political statement. It is simply an outline of principles we believe should be embraced by a new revolutionary organization. It is our hope that this document will not only add to the debate on the structure and politics of a new organization but help to push the development of such a group to the next level.

Neither the Vanguard nor the Network

A revolutionary organization for the 21st century needs to forge a path between the Leninist vanguard party favored by traditional Marxist parties and the loose "network" model of organizing favored by many anarchists and activists today. The purpose of a revolutionary organization is to act as a cadre group that develops politics and strategies that contribute to mass movements toward a free society.

It is not a vanguard group. It does not seek to control any organization or movement, nor does it pretend that it is the most advanced section of a struggle and thus has the right to act in the interests of the masses. Instead, it assumes that the masses are typically the most advanced section of a struggle and that the cadre perpetually strives to learn from and identify with the masses. At the same time, a cadre organization does not pretend it doesn't provide leadership for larger movements, nor does it pretend that leadership is inherently authoritarian. A cadre organization does not seek to control any organization or movement, it aims to help lead it by providing it with a radical perspective and committed members dedicated to developing its autonomous revolutionary potential. A cadre group should debate those politics and strategies that best imagine and lead to a free society and then fight to enact them in mass-oriented organizations and movements.

A cadre is not an umbrella organization. It does not participate in any and all kinds of progressive social activism. Instead, a cadre group seeks out, helps develop, and supports those forms of agitation that undermine the rule of official society and that in some way prefigure the new society. In other words, the organization would not actively support any kind of activism but only those struggles that hold the potential of building a dual power. We imagine that such a revolutionary organization would be to contemporary movements what the FAI was to the CNT in Spain or the First International was to the European working class movements: a membership organization of like-minded persons committed to developing and encouraging the autonomous revolutionary tendencies in our present society.

A Democratic Structure

In the proposed organization, all power and authority should be transparent, accountable, distributed democratically, and effective. We believe the structure for a new organization should be based on the following principles:

1. Direct democracy. All members should have an equal say in those affairs that affect the organization. Unlike democratic centralism, this would include the right to freely express disagreements with decisions made by the majority. This type of democracy doesn't mean that a minority faction can disrupt the decisions of the majority, which tends to occur in loose network structures (i.e. consensus processes).

2. Membership. The organization should be a membership organization. Only members ought to make decisions about and act on the behalf of the organization. The organization should be controlled only by those who commit themselves to it. Criteria for membership should be clearly established, along with criteria for suspending or expelling members who violate the organization's principles. Membership criteria should include both political and financial commitments to the organization.

3. Local branches. The group should be organized into local branches. One criteria of membership would be to join a local branch or to form one if one doesn't exist.

4. Effectiveness and accountability. A democratic means of making decisions and carrying them out should be established. Members who do not meet their responsibilities should be held accountable for failing to do so.

Against the White Race

The proposed organization's priority should be to destroy white supremacy. White supremacy is a system that grants those defined as "white" special privileges in American society, such as preferred access to the best schools, neighborhoods, jobs, and health care; greater advantages in accumulating wealth; a lesser likelihood of imprisonment; and better treatment by the police and the criminal justice system. In exchange for these privileges, whites agree to police the rest of the population through such means as slavery and segregation in the past and through formally "colorblind" policies and practices today that still serve to maintain white advantage. White supremacy, then, unites one section of the working class with the ruling class against the rest of the working class. This cross-class alliance represents the principle obstacle, strategically speaking, to revolution in the United States. Given the United States' imperial power, this alliance has global implications.

The central task of a new organization should be to break up this unholy alliance

between the ruling class and the white working class by attacking the system of white privilege and the subordination of people of color. This is not to say that white supremacy is the "worst" form of oppression in this country, nor is it to imply that if white supremacy disappears then all other forms of oppression will magically melt away. Instead, it is a strategic argument, based on an analysis of U.S. history, designed to attack the American death star at its weakest point. The glue that has kept the American state together has been white supremacy; melting that glue creates revolutionary possibilities.

Against the State

The proposed organization should be anti-statist. The function of the state is to 1) perpetuate the rule of the oppressing class and 2) maintain its own power. It therefore has nothing to do with a free society and should be abolished. A revolutionary strategy seeks to undermine the state by developing a dual power strategy. A dual power strategy is one that directly challenges institutions of power and at the same time, in some way, prefigures the new institutions we envision. A dual power strategy not only opposes the state, it also prepares us for the difficult questions that will arise in a revolutionary situation.

The organization should also support the principle of self-determination, or the right for people to control their own life and destiny. Movements for self-determination have often assumed the politics of nationalism. Anarchists have traditionally rejected nationalism as a tool of oppression. We recognize that anti-statism and nationalism are often contradictory tendencies, since nationalism often supports the creation of nation-states. However, nationalism has also been a liberating force in world history, particularly in the struggle against colonialism. Thus, despite its contradictions nationalist struggles cannot be rejected out of hand by anti-authoritarian revolutionaries. The task is to develop anti-statist tendencies within nationalist movements, not to denounce the struggles of oppressed peoples because they assume a nationalist form.

A Feminist Organization

Any new organization should be explicitly feminist, in several ways. First, a revolutionary organization should have a radical feminist analysis of our society that challenges male dominance, compulsory heterosexuality, and the bipolar gender

system that forces humans into "male" and "female" and "masculine" and "feminine" categories. Second, its internal operations (organizing structure, allocation of positions of leadership, meeting procedures, debating habits, etc.) should ensure women's participation and be strongly aware of practices that tend to favor men's voices over women's. Third, it should be committed to feminist political work, particularly those kinds of agitation that connect struggles against sexism with struggles against white supremacy. Finally, a revolutionary organization needs a feminist vision. It should imagine a world not only without sexism or homophobia but one in which gender relations are completely transformed. Toward this end, it should encourage resistance to masculine/feminine gender borders and encourage people to critique and explore their desires rather than repress them.

Strategy

The proposed federation should recognize that political theory, no matter how strong, can accomplish little if it is not combined with effective strategy. The actions taken by the organization, its involvement in mass movements, and its public statements should all be determined on a strategic basis. The focus of our work should be involving ourselves in movements and activism where there is the potential to work toward the building of a dual power. Social reforms won by progressive movements may be important, but if they do not work toward a dual power they are not the concerns of a revolutionary organization. For example, animal liberation is a worthy cause. However, it is difficult to imagine how a campaign for animal liberation could threaten state power and foreshadow a new society. Thus, while a revolutionary organization may applaud animal liberation activities, it would not devote energy toward animal rights. On the other hand, a program to develop local Copwatch chapters could represent a dual power strategy, since monitoring the police undermines state power by disrupting the cops' ability to enforce class and color lines and also foreshadows a new society in which ordinary people take responsibility for ensuring the safety of their communities.

Thus, campaigns developed by the organization that do not contribute toward the building of a dual power should be abandoned. If a popular protest movement has little hope of building a dual power, it is not one we should be collectively involved in. We may morally and politically approve of such movements but as a small group with limited resources, we must reject the liberalism of reform activism and concern

ourselves with revolutionary strategy.

Vision

One of the great failings of modern radical organizations has been the failure to provide a strong vision of a new society. We are able to say what we are against but rarely what we are for. One purpose of a revolutionary organization is to provide people with a vision of a world worth fighting for. Lack of vision is one of the reasons why radicals have historically failed to win the working class to their politics. Unfortunately, the fascist right has not failed in this task; they offer a clear vision of the world they want to create. If we continue to fail to offer a vision of our own, we cannot expect to win people over to revolutionary politics.

Bring the Ruckus

This proposal is the product of our readings and discussion on various radical organizations and movements over the past year, ranging from works produced by the Black liberation struggle, women's liberation, the abolitionists, and both classical and contemporary revolutionary anarchism. The praxis addressed within is also based on our experience with grassroots political work, particularly in Phoenix Copwatch.

Political Education Committee
End of year report 2008

Committee Critique:

The Political Education Committee of Bring the Ruckus has basically ceased to function in recent months. We have not met for several months, and the work of the subcommittees has come to a standstill. Over the last year the committee has failed to function in playing an active role for the political education of the organization and its membership.

At the National Meeting in Phoenix the Political Education Committee put forward a proposal to focus on questions of cadre organization. The proposal was vague and not particularly well formed, and was eventually withdrawn. Since the Committee's foundation at the National Meeting in Portland it has been delegated specific tasks by the organization. The first year we created a number of political education notebooks on subjects such as revolutionary organization, white supremacy, and feminism. The following year we organized regional forums where our members and other discussed questions relating to feminist praxis. Last year we did not leave the National Meeting with a mandate from the organization, so on our own we groped toward figuring out the nature of our work. Eventually we split up into two working groups. One of these was to continue developing the notebooks and the other was to foment discussion and education around the question of cadre organization.

The cadre working group met once. We had a conference call with two of the three members of the working group and a representative of the Coordinating Committee. This was a useful conversation and we discussed what some of the major questions relating to the functioning of a cadre group. A report detailing the conversation and the questions it raised was drafted. The Committee as a whole never met again, so the document was not approved and thus never shared with the membership of the organization.

The notebook working group met on a few occasions. We were tasked with wrangling the notebooks including developing revision guidelines and plans for updating the notebooks. We were also tasked with nudging folks who were developing new notebooks. Once we developed the guidelines, the committee as a whole approved them but our attempts to put them into action were hampered in part by the failure of the general committee to meet.

When it comes down to it the Political Education Committee never got going this year. On a subjective level, various committee members did work and tried to move forward, but objectively as a committee of Bring the Ruckus, the last year has been a wash. E-Mails went out often, trying to pull together a conference call. People would respond with their availability, coordination would be nightmarish, and a month or so later another email would go out calling for a conference call. Criticisms can certainly be leveled at every member of the committee for not getting it together. Criticisms can be leveled at the committee as a whole for not creating mechanisms of coordination and accountability.

Criticisms can be leveled at the Coordinating Committee for not challenging and supporting the Political Education Committee's functioning. However, it seems unlikely that our failure was entirely a result of these factors. This committee has functioned and done good work in the past. In the past it has also carried out the mandates of the organization as a whole (even when these were proposed by the committee itself.) It seems that this committee functions best when clear tasks have been delegated to it by the organization. Lacking them, we floundered over the last year groping for tasks to carry out, without a clear sense of accountability to the membership.

Cadre Working Group Final Thoughts:

"Build the Cadre…" Some Thoughts on Organizational Questions from the Cadre Working Group of the Political Education Committee

The Political Education committee has divided into two working groups, one that is continuing to develop study notebooks, and one to provoke dialogue about the nature of cadre organization within Bring the Ruckus. So far this Cadre Working Group has basically failed to accomplish anything since it came into being. We did post a short piece on the internal boards inviting members to discuss the question of cadre organization (what is a cadre group? what does it mean to function within one?), but the response was, for the most part, silence. The Cadre Working Group had a conference call (with an observer/participant from the CC) to assess our work, and the next steps for the working group. We identified a number of questions related to revolutionary cadre organization, and are laid out below. Not all of these are things that are appropriate for the Political Education Committee to lead the way on, but they all seem to need to be addressed as we move forward in building Bring the Ruckus.

The first need that we talked about was for a collective understanding by our membership of what a cadre organization is. While some useful things have been said and written about our vision of revolutionary organization, there was a general feeling that there may be a need for a clearer "line" on what our idea of a cadre group is. It was recognized that in some way this is a complicated task given that there is a great deal of baggage associated with the term cadre organization. For many on the left the term carries heavy associations with the kinds of cultish, arrogant, and manipulative behavior that are so often engaged in by the various Trotskyist and Stalinist sects that pollute the political world. What makes us different? What does it mean to be a cadre organization that does not view itself as the anointed vanguard of working class struggle? What does this mean for how we do our work? Members of BTR certainly do have understandings of this, but it seems that we may need to do more to consolidate them into a common, collectively understood on line on the question of revolutionary organization.

Flowing from this first priority we identified the need for more study and discussion on these questions to take place in locals. Staring places for such a process might include the notebook on revolutionary organization, as well as Joel's piece, "What is a Cadre Organization." These documents, and the discussion that should flow

from them could serve as a basis of developing a more coherent and collective understanding of the tasks and functioning of our organization (at least on the level of the local). It also seemed clear that this is an area where the Political Education Committee can play a role through the development of notebooks and other means.

In addition to this kind of study on the local level there was interest in having related conversations nationally, probably in the context of the National Meeting. Exactly what form this would take is not clear, but shaping and facilitating a conversation about the revolutionary cadre organization and its role in struggle, might be something that the Agenda Committee for the National Meeting could work on.

One of the other needs that we discussed was of a clear process for recruitment. Bring the Ruckus still needs to develop a coherent strategy for how we recruit new members. This is a necessity for reasons of security and also so as not to recruit folks who are not actually in line with the politics or who cannot work collectively. Exactly what form such a process would take is not something we can determine, but nonetheless needs to continue to be addressed.

Also, on a more on the ground level are questions related to organizational culture and accountability. More than any one particular question, this is more a framework that includes a number of issues related to the structure, functioning, and feel of the revolutionary organization.

What exactly are the expectations that we have of our members? This is laid out in our bylaws, but we are not convinced that this is exhaustive (although we urge all members to revisit the document regularly). Do all members need to attend local meetings (is this a matter decided by the local)? Do all members need to be actively engaged in mass work that has been approved by the national organization? In relation to this, the questions arises of what mechanisms we use to address the problem of comrades not living up to their commitments and the organization's expectations of them?

How do members of BTR handle questions of transparency within our mass work, as well as in the left communities we may exist in? The case can certainly be made that a revolutionary organization needs to keep certain information to itself, but if so where is that line? When our non-BTR comrades ask us about BTR how do we respond? From the conversation we had, it seems as though some members do struggle with this. Here, the collective understanding of the cadre and its role seems valuable. Questions especially arise in relation to mass work. Comrades want to know about the other work we are engaged in. They may particularly be interested in how the cadre organization relates to the movements. Given the manipulative, and sometimes dishonest behavior of various Leninist cadre groupings this is certainly understandable. How do we explain to those folks we work with that, yes, BTR discusses and strategizes about how we intervene in struggle, but, no we are not trying to take over mass organizations in order to build our

own group at the expense of the movement as a whole?

In addition, there are other particular questions of transparency that arise. How do we respond when friends or comrades ask us how many members BTR has, or who the organization's members are in a particular area? Communist organizations have often chosen not to share these kinds of information with people outside their ranks. Is this a model that we want to follow? Why or why not? How are members both accountable to the organization and accountable to the broader movements as well?

When problems and conflicts do arise within the organization how do we confront each other in a way that is both compassionate and principled? In any organization people will flake, fail to meet responsibilities, dominate work or discussions, disrespect each other, enact forms of oppression, and hurt each other. All of us, know matter how committed to revolutionary struggle, remain products of this horrifying and dehumanizing system of "white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy." How then do we go about criticizing and challenging each other to act better, to be the best revolutionaries and the best human beings that we can be? How do we as an organization engage in criticism and self-criticism with each other in a way that supports each other's growth and confidence rather than tearing each other down? While the practice of CSC (criticism-self criticism) has justifiably gotten a bad name through its abusive use in the power machinations of the Stalinist movement, the need remains to have mechanisms by which we can challenge, criticize, and support each other in growing and changing.

Finally, related to the question of criticism and self-criticism is the question of challenging dynamics of oppression within the organization. As suggested earlier, we are all shaped by the white supremacist, patriarchal, heterosexist context in which we exist. As an organization that is predominantly white, male, and straight, this raises real issues. The first responsibility of the organization in challenging this is to build a solid political line that understands and fights white supremacy, patriarchy, heterosexism, and capitalism. Overall, we have been fairly successful on this level. However, challenging oppression within the revolutionary organization needs to deal with more than a political line (as necessary as that is). What further steps can we take to support members who are privileged in various ways transform themselves into better revolutionaries? What steps can we take to support those who are oppressed to turn the organization into the best vehicle of liberation? The creation of the women's caucus and its leading role in developing feminist politics has been one way of moving forward on this (although this cannot let gender-privileged men off the hook for developing gender liberation praxis). What other steps can we take on this issue?

Obviously the preceding document does not do much in the way of providing positive answers on how to move forward with building the revolutionary cadre organization. Rather this is an attempt to report on our discussions and to raise some of the questions and tasks that we see in relationship to this project. The Political Education Committee should address some of them, such as building a collective definition of cadre organization and engaging in study around the question of organization. We also believe that some organization-wide discussion on these questions should take place at the

National Meeting. However, overall, the task of building the revolutionary organization is a responsibility of all of us, and as a result we welcome ideas from everyone in the organization in addressing the questions and tasks we've attempted to raise.

Going Forward:

What then, should the Political Education Committee do next year? Various possibilities exist. The work that we've successfully done over the last several years can be continued. There are new notebooks to be solicited and edited. Also, regional dialogues along the lines of the ones held to discuss "The Liberatory Family" could be held on a variety of subjects and help to develop political affinity and political coherence. Specifically, we should identify particular areas of political development at the national meeting this year and both solicit notebooks as well as organize interim regional meetings around the topic. Looking at the agenda, some potential areas may include: The Ecological Crisis, the State of Race, How is BtR a Cadre organization, the state of Gender in the US, etc. The Political Education committee of Bring the Ruckus should also consider having a relationship with the "How to Think" classes that are being held around the country. Internally, we must have a strong leader to help wrangle the committee as a whole. We also need to be cognizant of our own time limitations and schedules as it was incredibly difficult to get the whole committee to meet at one time. We also need to identify and develop a plan for work early on. We should take our lead from the membership, but absent of this, we need to identify work and run with it. The pol-ed committee perhaps needs to be more forward thinking in terms of identifying work and areas of study and development by reading the boards, identifying strands of thought in the DB, as well as politics outside of the organization. We can then propose work to the larger membership. Overall, the Political Education Committee exists to support the organization, to help make sure that members are "on the same page" and share a common language and understandings of our organization's politics. How best can the committee function to prepare the membership to understand and defend the political line of Bring the Ruckus? What projects can best serve to develop political unity and coherence? Additionally, as an organization we must address what we feel the future of political education is for us. Are the notebooks useful? Can members commit to engage in a national program of political education? What should we be reading and discussing outside of the notebooks? Should the political education committee be developing a syllabus of sorts? These are the questions that the committee faces, and it seems that we have been unable to answer them on our own. Ultimately this committee only functions with the support of the membership. We need to identify ways to make that happen.

What is a Cadre Organization?

by Joel Olson

The purpose of an organization like Bring the Ruckus might be unclear to some observers or readers of our website. This article is intended to explain what the purpose and function of Ruckus is in the struggle to build a free society. I originally wrote it for Ruckus's 2005 national conference.

What is a cadre group?

A cadre organization is a group of committed, active, revolutionary intellectuals who share a common politics and who come together to develop revolutionary thought and practice and test it out in struggle. By "active" I mean one who is involved in political struggle, not merely a book reader. By "intellectual" I don't mean someone with a college degree but one who makes a serious, ongoing commitment to understanding the world in order to better agitate within it.

A cadre group is not a mass group like Janitors for Justice, Critical Resistance, Copwatch, or Communities United, although its members should be active in such groups. Nor does it presume to be leaders of these groups, although its members may assume leadership roles if they deserve them. It does not seek to co-opt or use these groups for its own ends (that's called a front group), although it definitely participates democratically in struggles over their purpose and direction. Rather, a cadre group seeks to participate in those mass struggles that have the best chance to blow the lid off this society, and it seeks to make those struggles as radical and democratic as possible.

What is a cadre group for?

The purpose of a cadre group is to encourage the development of a revolutionary working class in the United States. A cadre group seeks to understand the world it lives in, identify the forces in it that are struggling in radical ways, and develop those forces in a way that is consistent with the cadre's politics.

Marx argues in the Communist Manifesto that the purpose of a cadre group is to radicalize and internationalize working class struggles. That is, a cadre should help

the working class in one area connect its struggle to struggles in other areas, as well as overcome religious, ethnic, and other distinctions that prevent working class unity. A cadre group should also help show the working class the inherently radical nature of their actions, which might otherwise seem reformist (such as the struggle to reduce the length of the working day to ten hours).

For C.L.R. James, the purpose of a cadre organization is to "observe and record." That is, it should observe working-class struggles and record them (via a newspaper) so that the working class can see for itself what it is doing and the radical nature of its struggle.

I think Marx and James are essentially correct, except I would add that a cadre group should also participate in those struggles that we think have the most revolutionary potential. Thus, the function of a cadre group like BTR is to observe, record, and participate in working class struggles that have the potential to bring about a free world.

What is the role of political analysis in a cadre group?

A cadre exists first and foremost for the benefit of revolutionaries. It seeks to organize the revolutionaries, not the masses. (Organizing mass movements is the job of larger grassroots organizations, of which cadre members should participate in.) Its benefit to ordinary folks and non-revolutionary activists is at best indirect—at least up until the barricades go up and people are actively looking for new ideas and new ways to organize the world. Thus, a cadre group seeks to develop a political line and the politics of its members in the service of revolutionary struggle. The politics of a cadre group today should imply the expansion of democracy to all aspects of a person's life and a radical rejection of capitalism and the state. The state is not a path to a classless society but an obstacle to be smashed. This politics is spelled out, more or less, in our statement, "Bring the Ruckus."

What strategies does a cadre group develop?

A friend of mine, when giving talks, tells people to imagine that capitalism is the death star and we are the rebels. We are hopelessly outgunned and outnumbered, and so we can't take on the death star directly. Given this, what do we do? We have to find the system's weakest point and concentrate our attack there, she argues. This is exactly what a cadre group needs to do. A cadre group, then, seeks to develop a

strategy that can best take advantage of a crisis in capitalism.

The cadre group tries to find and exploit cracks in the system, and to fill in those cracks with the seeds of a new society. In other words, a cadre group should try to devise and implement strategies that can build a dual power.

As the "Bring the Ruckus" statement puts it, dual power strategies are "those forms of agitation that undermine the rule of official society and that in some way prefigure the new society." Put more simply, dual power is a situation in which two (or more) social forces assert power over the same territory and are capable of fighting for it. Such a situation is obviously unstable and quickly leads to conflict. When this conflict becomes protracted, it leads to civil war—revolution.

Ruckus's Six Criteria guide our dual power strategies. We work to build a dual power by attacking white supremacy and thereby breaking up the cross-class alliance and its "wages of whiteness" that presents the central obstacle to working class unity in the United States.

How does a cadre relate to grassroots movements?

A cadre organization seeks to participate in those grassroots (or "mass") struggles that it believes has the most revolutionary potential, based on the cadre's political analysis. At the national level, a cadre organization develops and implements dual power strategies for its members nationwide to participate in. At a local level, the local cadre participates in grassroots struggles that fit within the national strategy, debates their effectiveness in local meetings, reports back to the national organization, and seeks to move the grassroots struggle in a radical direction according to these discussions. Let me give two examples, one at the national level and one at the local.

The Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation, which existed from 1992 to 1998, defined three areas of work with revolutionary potential. One of these was anti-fascist political work. L&R created an Anti-Fascist Working Group at the national level to engage in this struggle. This WG determined that the best place to do anti-fascist work was within a grassroots organization called Anti-Racist Action. Thus, the WG called for Love and Rage members to join ARA and do anti-fascist work within it. L&R's role was to participate in this work and try to lead it in radical directions. L&R members did not assume leadership in ARA unless they had earned it, and they did

not seek to “control” ARA. The commitment to doing the work of the grassroots organization and to participating in a democratic manner distinguishes a cadre from a front group.

An example of how a local cadre works can be found in the relationship between Phoenix Ruckus and Phoenix Copwatch. Phoenix BTR started up Copwatch in 1998 but once Copwatch was up and running, BTR relinquished control and Copwatch became an independent organization. BTR members now participate in Copwatch as Copwatch members, and any leadership positions come from that participation, not from being in Ruckus. Phoenix Ruckus frequently discusses Copwatch at its meetings, trying to devise ways to improve Copwatch’s work and revolutionary potential. Phoenix Ruckus also reports back to the national organization. Phoenix Ruckus should also regularly communicate with other anti-cop agitators in Bring the Ruckus nationwide, exchanging ideas on tactics and strategies. Based on these discussions, if Phoenix BTR has an idea for how to move Copwatch in a more effective and radical direction, they take it to a Copwatch meeting and put it up for debate and a vote.

Phoenix BTR participates in Copwatch instead of, say, Food Not Bombs, because it thinks that Copwatch has the best potential to lead to a situation of dual power than any other form of political work in Phoenix. Copwatch challenges the authority of the state, obstructs the function of the police (to maintain color and class lines), and prefigures a society in which ordinary people take responsibility for ensuring the safety of their communities. Phoenix BTR (at its most hopeful moments, at least) believes that given the right confluence of social forces (and a good bit of luck), Copwatch has the potential to develop into the kind of wedge that could create and generalize anti-police rebellions like Los Angeles ’92.

Many members in Love and Rage did not have a clear sense of the purpose of a cadre organization, and therefore the purpose of L&R. This contributed to the collapse of L&R, particularly in Minneapolis. Given this, it is essential that Ruckus members have a solid grasp of the purpose of our organization.

The cadre and the revolution

A cadre group should not try to “lead the revolution.” Its task is to bring out the revolutionary tendencies that already exist in society. A cadre group will not to start

a revolution. It will rarely lead one, either. But even if its members never live to see revolutionary times (e.g. Love and Rage) and even if its members labor in relative obscurity (e.g. Sojourner Truth Organization), it can still play an indispensable role in preparing people for protracted struggle against the state.

To steal a metaphor, the role of a group like Ruckus in non-revolutionary times (which I believe we live in today) is to be a crouching tiger, laying in wait for a social crisis (such as a depression or a new civil rights movement) to break out that challenges the legitimacy and stability of the state. If and when an event occurs, the cadre pounces, seeking to exploit this instability for revolutionary ends.

As the "Bring the Ruckus" statement puts it, a revolutionary organization "does not seek to control any organization or movement, nor does it pretend that it is the most advanced section of a struggle and thus has the right to act in the interests of the masses. Instead, it assumes that the masses are typically the most advanced section of a struggle and that the cadre perpetually strives to learn from and identify with the masses. At the same time, a cadre organization does not pretend it doesn't provide leadership for larger movements, nor does it pretend that leadership is inherently authoritarian. A cadre organization does not seek to control any organization or movement, it aims to help lead it by providing it with a radical perspective and committed members dedicated to developing its autonomous revolutionary potential."

DRAFT NOTEBOOK
On
Revolutionary Organization

BTR Political Development Committee

October 2005*

Contents:

1. Organization Means Commitment
2. The Tyranny of Structurelessness by Jo Freeman
3. M. Treloar, *The Tyranny of Consensus*

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*We have included a selection below from the 2005 Notebook on Revolutionary Organization. Other pieces we recommend people read, but were not copied properly in the original notebook are the following:

- What kind of Revolutionary Organization is Useful Today? (Love and Rage Editorial)
- Chris Day, Love and Rage in the New World Order
- Introduction to A New World in Our Hearts (Roy)

ORGANIZATION MEANS COMMITMENT

2011 Introduction
Grace Lee Boggs

I wrote *Organization Means Commitment* in the early 1970s in response to African American activists who, after reading the Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party, were asking us what kind of organization they should build.

This little paper was our answer. I wrote but didn't sign it because the ideas in it came from a number of sources, including the Conversations in Maine, and we were already putting them into practice. We never anticipated that it would be reprinted by Spear & Shield. And that many years later it would be read by Yusef Shakur in prison and help him think about how he should organize after his release. And that in 2010 questions would arise about who wrote it and who owned the re-printing rights.

In the early 1970s we had just emerged from a very violent and tumultuous decade. Urban rebellions had exploded all over the country. President Kennedy, Malcolm and Martin, Robert Kennedy had been assassinated.

In the midst of this turmoil Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, accompanied by a handful of armed youth, marched on the California state legislature to protest a ban on weapons and to announce the founding of

the Black Panther Party. Overnight, this very visible defiance turned their new party into a mass party, attracting thousands of angry young blacks ready to confront the "pigs," but also making it possible for the "pigs" to send agent provocateurs into the party to propose violent actions and crimes that would result in huge numbers of young lives being wasted.

Organization Means Commitment was written to project a very different concept of revolutionary organization and leadership, the kind that could only be developed by many years of patient and protracted theoretical and practical struggles. Creating this concept of leadership and of an organization involved:

- Creating an organizational structure to develop every member into a leader instead of depending on a few charismatic leaders, as the movement had done in the 1960s.
- Distinguishing between Rebellion and Revolution. As we explained in *Revolution and Evolution in the 20th Century* (RETC): Rebellion is a stage in the development of revolution but it is not revolution. It is an important stage because it represents the standing up of the oppressed. To make a revolution people must not only struggle against existing institutions. They must make a philosophical leap and become more human human beings. In order to change/transform the world, they must change/transform themselves."
- Thinking dialectically, i.e., recognizing that reality is constantly changing; that an idea that is progressive at one point can turn into its opposite at a later point. Also, because in everything there is both the positive and negative, the responsibility of revolutionary leadership in times of crisis is not just to denounce or protest oppression but to project a vision that encourages grassroots creation of positive alternatives.
- Making very clear that a revolution in an advanced industrial country like the United States must be very different from the revolutions that have taken place in Third World or developing countries. The rapid economic development of the United

States was achieved by enslaving African-Americans and dispossessing and exterminating Native Americans. Therefore, the fundamental contradiction that was built into our founding and must be resolved by the next American Revolution is the contradiction between our economic and technological overdevelopment and our human and political underdevelopment.

Because we never lost sight of this fundamental contradiction, over the last thirty years we have been able again and again to project actions that challenge the American people to transform both ourselves and our institutions. *Organization Means Commitment* means committing ourselves to this kind of transformational organizing, organizing which does not mainly denounce and protest oppression or mobilize Americans to struggle for more material things, but challenges us as Americans to evolve or transform ourselves into more human human beings.

Recognizing that revolutionary leadership means more than just protesting oppression but also projecting a vision that encourages grassroots creation of positive alternatives designed to create more human humans, transformative organizing involves doing the work of loving each other in ways that seem ridiculous if we only think of revolutionary change as masses of people mobilized to make demands on a state. Because our historical reality has been shaped the actions of human beings who have internalized the contradiction between technological overdevelopment and human underdevelopment, even if we protest so effectively that we acquire state power, if we don't change our ways of thinking and relating to one another, we will only further develop this contradiction with new people in charge. These changes must be rooted in love.

Because the next American Revolution must resolve this contradiction, the organizing that creates it will not simply be anti-imperialist, anti-racist, anti-sexist, or anti-ableist. Instead, the love

based organizing that creates the next American Revolution will recognize that all these 'isms' are the logical outgrowth of a system whose internal logic is shaped by the loveless contradiction between technological overdevelopment and human underdevelopment. Therefore, the only way to secure freedom from these forms of oppression to create the freedom to develop and practice new types of more human relationships. Only by developing these kinds of loving relationships can we as humans heal ourselves—and each other—from the damage done to us by an economic and political system bent on creating wealth at the expense of all living things. Through healing ourselves and our communities we can enable ourselves to stop reacting to oppression and begin the process of projecting healthier, more human alternatives that don't benefit us at the expense of the rest of the world.

As Jimmy wrote in chapter 6 of RETC, "The revolution to be made in the United States will be the first revolution in history to require the masses to make material sacrifices rather than to acquire more material things. We must give up many of the things which this country has acquired at the expense of damning over one-third of the world into a state of underdevelopment, ignorance, disease and early death….It is obviously going to take a tremendous transformation to prepare the people of the United States for these new social goals. But potential revolutionaries only become true revolutionaries if they take the side of those who believe that humanity can be transformed." (Originally published in 1974; RETC was re-issued with a new introduction by me in 2009).

Almost forty years after it was originally written, the Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership is publishing *Organizing Means Commitment* because its reprint by Spear & Shield as well as several recent questions raised by young people in reference to it tells us that it should be published. Because of these questions, we think *Organizing Means Commitment* has a role to play in nurturing the transformational leadership capacities of individuals and organizations committed to creating

productive, sustainable, ecologically responsible, and just communities. If it is read and discussed through local, national and international networks of activists, artists and intellectuals, we think it can foster new ways of living, being and thinking to face the challenges of the 21st century.

ORGANIZATION MEANS

COMMITMENT

(Commitment Is The Key)

(Anonymous) Grace Lee Boggs

Introduction

As the US enters the 70's, some people are beginning to discuss the question of how to build a revolutionary cadre organization. Most of those who are discussing it will never get beyond the point of discussion, while of those who are actually beginning to organize, only a minority will probably be around a few years from now.

This is because it is not at all easy to build a revolutionary cadre organization. It takes a lot of time and patience; a lot of hard work and struggle; a continuing relationship from and to the revolutionary and progressive social forces within your society; a continuing expansion and enrichment of your own revolutionary vision and that of the revolutionary social force; the ability to think independently as well as to accept discipline cheerfully; and unrelenting self-criticism and struggle to overcome your own shortcomings. This work and struggle, this time and patience, this continuing relationship, this expansion and enrichment, this independence and discipline, this criticism and self-criticism, can only come from a continuing commitment in theory and in practice to the conviction that at the heart of (every great revolution) is the urgent need to transform Man/Woman into a new and more advanced form of human being by means of struggle. **The only justification for a revolution is that it accelerates the evolution of man and woman.** The first thing you need for such a commitment is an unshakable conviction that **Correct ideas matter and that once the correct ideas are grasped by the great masses of people, they become a material force capable**

of changing society and the world. In a country like the U.S. where there is so much respect for things and so little respect for ideas, the number of people with this conviction is still very small; and the number whose convictions cannot be shaken is even smaller. When your friends and associates accuse you of having too much faith in ideas or in "human nature," it takes a pretty strong person to hold firm.

One of the most difficult hurdles that a cadre group has to overcome at its first meeting (and often at subsequent meetings) is the feeling among those present that there must be something wrong with them because they are so few. In a country like the U.S., where it is normal and natural to judge the value and importance of everything according to the size (the bigger the better), it is not easy to grasp and hold firm to the historical fact that **every advance that has ever been made by humankind was started by a few people**, often, to begin with, by only one individual, since every beginning can only be A beginning. Someone—it may have been a man or a woman—was the first to use a piece of stone as a hatchet or hammer or ax; in other words, to take the first step in tool-making (two million) years ago, which has now led to the machine age of lathes, punch presses, and dynamos. Similarly, someone—it may have been a man or woman—was the first to mold a pot out of mud...Elsewhere on earth, maybe another continent, or maybe only a few miles away, another man or woman at approximately the same time may have been doing the same things. But the first man or woman to take this first crude step in tool-making or pottery did not know this. Nor did he or she stop to speculate why only he or she or just a few others were taking this step.

The practice of judging a step forward in humankind's productive or political evolution by the number of people involved is a modern, western, and especially American prejudice. When a handful of people met in 1921 to organize the Chinese Communist Party which now governs 750 million people, they knew, of course, that the party had to become much larger before it could lead the Chinese revolution to victory over imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism. But those present did not look around at each other and ask, ''Why us rather than anyone else?" They knew that anything which men and women create, any advance which humankind makes, must have a beginning and that every beginning must be made by those few individuals who choose to

begin something because they feel it should be begun. Before something can GROW, it must first BE.

A. The Role of Revolutionary Cadre Organization

Building a revolutionary cadre organization is enormously difficult, but there is no mystery about the essential functions of such an organization. Just as the individual human being requires a mind to synthesize the many varied experiences which it receives through the senses, so the revolutionary social forces in a revolutionary period require a revolutionary cadre organization. Just as the mind acts as a **center** for the senses giving and receiving impulses, so the revolutionary cadre organization acts as a **center for the revolutionary social forces.** Neither can replace the other; nor can either develop without continuing interaction with the other. They are the two poles of a developing and dynamic relationship, continually enriching one another in a never ending spiral process of "from the masses, to the masses."

This **dialectical** concept is the key to the building of a revolutionary cadre organization.

The first task of a revolutionary' cadre organization is theoretical **analysis** and **synthesis**. That is to say, the cadre organization must first reflect upon the specific social realities within which it is operating, with the aim of arriving at a clear conception of: **A) How this social reality has developed historically,** and B) **The contradictions within this reality which are the basis for further development.** The cadre organization must then, **C) Define which of these contradictions are the principal and major ones** requiring solutions if the society is to advance; and **D) Develop a vision of what kind of new reality** will be created by the resolution of those principal or major contradictions. Finally, the revolutionary cadre organization must, **E) Determine which sectors of the society have the greatest potential for the struggle necessary to resolve these contradictions and create this new reality.**

These theoretical concepts together constitute the ideology of the cadre organization.

After deriving its ideology from reflections upon the social realities, the cadre organization must devise concrete programs to go to the revolutionary social forces (masses, people) in order to mobilize them in struggles to create new reality through resolving the major contradictions of the society. In devising and projecting these concrete pro-

grams, the cadre organization must be concerned not only to increase the momentum of struggle and the physical power of the revolutionary social forces. It must also be concerned to bring about a **transformation** in these forces. That is to say, it must seek to increase their initiative, their critical, political consciousness, their sense of collectivity and responsibility, and the structures with which they can not only bring about the collapse of the existing oppressive society, but also create a new society.

The cadre organization, in other words, must be concerned not only with the quantitative but with the qualitative development of the mass struggle and of the revolutionary social forces. It must take seriously the fact that all the people within a given society, including the revolutionary social forces, are shaped by the dominant values of the society. In the light of the revolutions that have taken place all over the world in the past half century, beginning with the Russian Revolution of 1917, anyone claiming to be a revolutionist must be willing to look beyond the question of power to what happens after the taking of power. Hence, s/he must be concerned not only with increasing the anger and militance of the oppressed but also their determination and capacity to transform themselves. Otherwise, willfully or not, s/he is only preparing them for despair and hence for the leadership of demagogues, and s/he himself/herself is not a revolutionist, but a rebel or a demagogue.

At the same time the cadre organization is also providing the **framework** within which the cadre members themselves can be constantly transforming themselves into more conscious, more responsible, more creative and more critical human beings—to whom the revolutionary masses can increasingly look for leadership because they can recognize in them actual, living witnesses to the possibility of creating new men and women.

If the **ideology** of the cadre organization is sound; if its **program** meets the needs of the revolutionary social forces; if the cadre themselves are in a close and continuing relationship with these forces, then the revolutionary social forces will begin to struggle around these programs.

In turn, these struggles will bring about new situations, involving new contradictions and new conflicts. This means that the cadre organization must be continuously prepared to reevaluate its ideas of the social reality and to devise new programs to take to the revolution-

ary social forces.

Thus constantly deepening and enriching both their ideas and their relationship with the revolutionary social forces, the cadre never lose sight of their primary commitment to the revolutionary cadre organization. It is the center from which they go outwards and to which they return. It provides the framework within which they can be continuously re-evaluating their theory and practice and continuously transforming themselves so as to be better able to live up to the historic task for which they accepted responsibility.

B. The American Political Background

The difficulty in understanding the role of the revolutionary cadre organization does not stem from any intrinsic mystery in this role. Rather, it stems from the lack of experience of Americans in the political process of continuing commitment to the kind of systematic, collective, dialectical, theoretical and practical struggle which is at the heart of a revolutionary cadre organization. For historical reasons, the approach of most Americans to social has always been a pragmatic or problem-solving approach which is essentially anti-intellectual. In what has been described as the "headache syndrome," they react to and try to resolve each problem it arises, as if each were a sporadic, isolated or accidental problem in a system which is fundamentally sound, and therefore capable of quick and easy solutions.

In the recent period, confidence in the soundness of American institutions has plummeted, chiefly under the impact of the revolutionary struggles of Vietnamese people and the revolt of blacks. The result is that a great many Americans, black and white, no longer think of American problems as isolated or accidental. They have traced their roots to the "system" of "capitalism and racism" and concluded that a revolution is necessary in the US. They have further identified the chief revolutionary social forces to make this revolution as the blacks and other non-white (so-called) minorities.

However, for the most part, these people still strongly resist the ideas of committing themselves to the kind of collective and protracted struggle in the dialectical relationship to the revolutionary social forces outlined above. They no longer look at the problems of this society in a

piecemeal fashion, to be solved one by one. But they still regard the revolutionary struggle as a series of isolated events, “happenings” and “experiences.” The result is that they do not have a framework within which to do the continual evaluation that is necessary, and their angry attacks on the system turn into abstractions and rhetorical denunciations.

Always “on the go,” attracted to whatever or whoever turns them on, they jump from one activity or group to another, judging the revolutionary content of that activity or group by its militancy or by the excitement and relief which it offers from boredom and frustration, i.e., quantitatively and subjectively. In the past few years, white youth, rebelling against the materialism and individualism of their middle-class parents, have been drifting in and out of communes and collectives. They claim to be seeking collectivity but they are unwilling to make the long range commitment to any group which is the prerequisite to collective struggle and collective learning. As a result, the collectives and communes springing up and disappearing all over the country are little more than aggregates of subjectivities in which each individual is still doing his or her “own thing.”

These young people have substituted for the pragmatic, anti-intellectual attitudes of their forebears, a new anti-intellectual attitude which is the unique product of the post-World War II society. Raised in a world of unceasing novelty and mobility, of revolutions in production and abundance in consumption, of instant communication and spaceship transportation, they have been culturally deprived of the experience through protracted struggle which has been the good and bad fortune of every previous generation, if only in the productive arena. As a result, they have an existentialist philosophy or the conviction that life consists essentially of momentary experiences.

In the 1960's, this lack of experience in protracted struggle was not a serious handicap. In fact, in retrospect, it was an enormous advantage since it enabled young people to leapfrog the old radical organizations with their obsolete theories and programs (still stemming from the experience of 1917 revolution in Russia), and to create instead a new and unique style of politics. This “new style of politics” centered around the dramatization of confrontations which were then carried into every living room through television. Staging these confrontations

and using the mass media with enormous skill, the movement leaders of the late 50's and 60's, black and white, were able to overnight bring home to the entire society the barbarism of US racism and the genocidal war in Vietnam. Radicalized by these methods young Americans, particularly young black Americans, exploded in the streets of practically every major city in the country, creating by the late 60's a social crisis of unprecedented magnitude with the entire society.

However, while the social crisis was obviously maturing, no cadre organization was being created to evaluate the new reality and to give direction to the emerging social forces. The result is that today the great majority of Americans, both those who feel oppressed by the system and those who support the system because of the benefits they have received from it, are completely bewildered. They feel as if they were being tossed about in the eye of a great storm with no idea where they should go or how to get there. Likewise, in the absence of a revolutionary cadre organization, most young people who played such an important role in creating the movement of the 60's have been without any framework within which they could collectively evaluate the situation and make new projections to the country, let alone transform themselves into more responsible, more conscious, more dedicated and more critical cadres. Left to their own individual devices, the great majority of them have drifted out of the movement or have gone the way of left or right opportunism. This is to say, many have become pure **adventurists**, making isolated and desperate attacks on the power structure or anyone who they think supports the power structure. Others have become **careerists**, "on the go" in one way or another, as consultants, project directors, or staff persons supported by federal, city and state agencies and by churches and universities in order to coopt the "heavies" of the movement.

C. Commitment Is Key

Against this background, it should be clear why the first step of any group of people seeking to build a cadre organization must be the decision of each individual in the group to commit herself or himself to a collective, protracted struggle in a dialectically developing relationship with the revolutionary social forces [people]. Those who are con-

vinced of the need for revolutionary social change and who, out of sober reflection on the concrete experiences of the recent past, have become convinced that spontaneous rebellions, revolts and confrontations—no matter how many or how spectacular—lead not to revolution, but to despair and confusion, should be ready to make this commitment out of their own volition.

If, among those who have come together to discuss the question, only two people are ready for this commitment, these two must resist the temptation to continue meeting with the others in the hope or illusion that by doing so, they will persuade the others to stop wavering and make a commitment to this temptation, they will discover in the end that they are left either with the same two people, or that they themselves have begun to waver, since the waverers are the ones who have behind them the pressure of the way things are, rather than of the way things should be.

The decision by a group of people, no matter how few, to commit themselves to this collective and protracted struggle and to reject "on the go" politics, shapes everything that follows. If their commitment is to become more than rhetorical "testifying," they must now embark on the concrete steps necessary to create a collectivity out of their separate selves. As it is, they are still individuals, with their own very different ideas about what is and what should be, what they should do and how they should do it, what they can expect from each other now and what they should be able to expect from each other as they begin to struggle together.

In order for the group to start **transforming their separate subjectivities**, they must first arrive, through organized discussion and an agreed-upon method of decision-making, an agreement on the following:

1. Their ideology.

2. A program or programs for activity within a prescribed period, long enough for them to complete some projects, and yet short enough so that they can see the end at the beginning.

3. A structure within which they can carry out these programs and which will also provide for the continuing growth and developing of the group as a whole and or every member in it.

4. Standards of membership.

5. Methods for continuing evaluation of their activities and themselves.

Some or all of these may be modified in the course of the organization's continuing development. Particularly in a revolutionary period, situations change very rapidly, and the ideas of the revolutionary organization must change accordingly. As situations change, different views over what should or should not be modified may at such time lead to such opposing proposals that those holding these opposing views cannot continue to co-exist in the same organization, and a split becomes unavoidable. But unless these changes or differences have developed in relationship to an original set of basic ideas, they cannot be dealt with as political differences, but will instead be interpreted as subjective or personality differences, with all the bitterness that usually accompanies such interpretations.

A (1): Ideology

For the last 50 years most radicals in the United States have thought that it was sufficient to define the American historical reality in terms of Marx's 19th century analysis of European capitalism and Lenin's pre-World War I analysis of European imperialism, simply adding to these the analysis of American racism, usually interpreted as a manifestation of capitalism or domestic imperialism. In the past ten years, the New Left radicals have continued to define the American historical reality in these terms. However, in recognition of the post-World War II struggles of Third World peoples inside and outside the United States and the increasingly middle-class character of the American workers, they have simply substituted Third World peoples for the working class which Marx and Lenin regarded as the revolutionary social force to destroy capitalism and imperialism.

None of these radicals, either in the past or recently, ever took

seriously the fact that Marx and Lenin were both developing their theories in systematic reflection upon their specific historical reality, a totally different historical reality from what exists in the United States today. Marx was writing at the beginning of the industrial revolution in Europe 100 years ago, and Lenin in backward Russia over 50 years ago, in periods when rapid development of the productive forces was the urgent concern of Europeans and Russians respectively. Today the United States is the most technologically advanced country in human history, producing goods and developing the productive forces with such rapidity that every politically conscious, socially responsible person is trying to think of how to slow development down. Far from being in material want, even the poorest layers of the population are constantly being courted by capitalism to buy, buy, buy; and state agencies subsidize these layers so their publicly-financed purchasing power can keep the economy going.

Yet, instead of analyzing this new social reality with the seriousness with which Marx and Lenin analyzed theirs, most radicals have simply reacted to the revolt of Third World peoples by casting them in the role which Marx and Lenin gave to the working class. Subsequently, as if vying for the leading role on the stage of this social drama, other groups, victimized and alienated within the society (women, youth, prisoners) have begun to substitute themselves for blacks. Now, some radicals, reacting to the chaos and absurdities into which this kind of rivalry to take the center of the stage is plunging the movement, have fallen back on the working class as hero, hoping against hope that spreading unemployment, inflation, taxes and other economic miseries may yet turn the working class into the revolutionary class which Marx's 19th century analysis called for.

Instead of just reacting to rebellions and to each other as these organizations are doing, the revolutionary cadre organization must make its own serious analysis of the unique historical development of the United States and of the new social tasks which have been uniquely posed as a result of its unprecedented material development. It should then be able to recognize that the major contradiction in this country is not an economic one, but rather the contradiction between this country's extremely advanced technological development and its extreme political and social underdevelopment. This

contradiction is manifested in the preoccupation of its people with their own private pursuits and their material comforts and in their lack of political consciousness and social responsibility, as well as of genuine self-governing institutions which could encourage the development of political consciousness and social responsibility. It can then be seen that the chief purpose of the revolution is to accelerate the rapid growth of political consciousness and social responsibility in the people so that they can **put politics in command of economics**, instead of being ruled by economics as they are today.

A (2): Program

Mass movement groups are reactive, issue-oriented groups who are constantly plunging into activity around the innumerable issues, usually defense issues, which are constantly surfacing in this period, such as “Free the Prisoners,” “Free Angela Davis,” “Abolish Stress” “Bring the Boys Back from Vietnam.” The result is that most of them disappear as rapidly as they appear. What usually continues is: A) either one of the Old Left organizations (CP-USA), SWP, PLM, etc.) or B) cliques of individuals who are often clustered around a particularly charismatic individual or one who is particularly gifted at fund raising or C) social groups of alumni or veterans of various struggles in the 60's.

Few of these, if any, have ever sat down to work out a program that a half dozen people could carry out over the period of a year in order to build themselves into a viable organization with their own collective identity and specific contribution to make to the overall movement. Most of the so-called revolutionaries in the US can rap about the need for a planned economy or for the reorganization of the entire united stales from top to bottom. But they never have taken the time to think through the **program** for even a small cadre organization: a clear conception of the **purposes** the group is trying to achieve, the **methods** by which they propose to achieve these purposes, a proposed **time schedule**, including deadlines for each step of the program, and the specific step-by-step **processes**.

When an organization works out clearly such programs, it also establishes a basis for the evaluation of its programs. Thereby it does one of the most important, yet deceptively simple, things that a revolutionary cadre organization can do: learn from experience or develop its

theory from social practice. Nowhere more than in the US is it so necessary to recognize and emphasize the importance of learning and the development of theory through a continuing relationship of your theory to practice. This is the only way to combat the powerful tendencies in this country to empty rhetoric (or talk without practice), and mindless activism or reactionary militancy, i.e., militancy to prove one's militancy or because it is fashionable to be militant, rather than to act because one has some deeply felt convictions about the way man/womankind can and should advance, and realizes that these convictions can only be tested in social practice. .

Therefore, in the initial period, the main programs of a revolutionary cadre organization should be **internal programs**. That is to say, they should be consciously aimed at transforming those who have come together on the basis of commitment to a collectivity, with a powerful sense of their developing and continuing collective identity and purpose. The first year programs of a cadre organization should center chiefly around the following:

A) The theoretical strengthening of the members (political education).
B) The development of the literature of the organization and the skills of the membership to enable them to take the ideas of the organization to the masses (propaganda).
C) The increase of the organization's members (recruitment).

The **Propaganda Program** of the organization is crucial to the development of the revolutionary struggle since as it cannot too often be repeated, once the correct ideas are grasped by the masses, they become a material force capable of changing society and the world. Particularly at this stage in the struggle, the major emphasis of the organization's propaganda must be on expanding the vision and increasing the critical political consciousness of the people, i.e., inspiring them with the broad purposes of the struggle and developing their capacity to de-mythologize and de-romanticize. To mobilize the masses in struggle or to increase their militancy without at the same time expanding their consciousness of their responsibility and capacity to create "new men and women," is only to lay the groundwork for their despair.

In mapping out the **Recruitment Program** of the organization,

great care should be taken to make the process of recruitment a selective one, aimed at slow and **qualitative** growth, rather than rapid expansion, taking care not to judge the growth of the organization by the numbers of its members, rather than by their commitment to the ideology and programs of the organization.

In the matter of recruitment, the cadre organization has few models to go on. In the past, it was ridiculously easy, particularly for a worker or a black person, to acquire membership in the CPUSA or the Trotskyite parties. The organizations, except for relatively brief periods right after the Russian Revolution had so little contact with the workers, and even less with blacks, and so few workers or blacks were attracted to these organizations, that each one became a kind of "prize;" so that if he or she showed any sign of being willing to join, the organization virtually subsidized them, sending them around the country on tours for the party so that the party could present a public image of black or worker membership.

Since the 60's, on the other hand, thousands of young people have been attracted to the new political organizations of all persuasions, ready to drift into (and out of) these organizations with the same lack of commitment as they have given to ad hoc organizations, particularly if the mass media has given these organizations any publicity. In turn, these organizations, living for the moment and for the spotlight, have recruited furiously in order to give the impression of a large public following. In the recent past we have had some instructive experiences with organizations who have expanded rapidly for the sake of and with the help of the media. Often they have discovered that they were recruiting many police agents. Even when this was not the case, they have still been at the mercy of their new members, most of who were attracted to the organization in the first place by the image of confrontation which they got from the mass media and who have therefore led the organization into confrontation after confrontation, until its entire energies and resources were exhausted in defense activities.

For all these reasons, it is important that the revolutionary cadre organization seek to avoid both rapid expansion and any kind of publicity, in full recognition of the fact that any rapidly expanding or publicity-oriented organization has no chance to do the learning and developing which are absolutely essential to preparation for rapid growth at a later stage of the protracted struggle.

For the same reasons, a cadre organization must acquire its basic finances from dues paid by its members and from the strictly political activities of the organization (sales of literature, public meetings, etc.), and not from grants or funds from private or public agencies. The danger is not that these agencies will put direct pressure on or try to dilute any militant activities which the organization may want to engage in. The corruption is much more insidious, arising from the fact that external funding deprives the organization and the membership of the opportunity and the responsibility to develop and lest their own commitment and their own ideas.

A (3): Structure

Regular meetings at least once a week and always **starting on time**, the keeping of minutes at every meeting and the reading of these minutes at the subsequent meeting, and a clearly-organized agenda for each meeting, are the elementary structural requirements for a revolutionary cadre organization. If it seems strange to emphasize what should be obvious, it is because these are not at all obvious in the "on the go" political atmosphere of today's movement, which is more likely to call meetings when the spirit moves it, to disdain the keeping of minutes and to regard presentation of an agenda as incipient bureaucratization or elitism.

Through regularly scheduled meetings, each member begins to internalize the structure of the group as part of his or her own living routines. Through the promptness with which every member arrives at the meeting, the unity of every one starting together is established. Through minutes a group takes responsibility for its programs and procedures from week to week and begins to get a concept of its own development as historical. Through a clearly organized agenda, the essentials of which should be the same from week to week, every member can be preparing between meetings for his or her participation at the meeting, thus creating a framework for the maximum participation of each member.

At the beginning of each meeting, the Chairperson is the one responsible for preparing the agenda. This can then be revised by the membership who must accept the agenda in its final form before the meeting proceeds. This apparently simple situation is an example of the leader-

ship-membership relationship which is essential to the development of a revolutionary cadre organization.

The establishment of structure with which leadership and membership can be developed is a very difficult problem inside the United States. On the one hand, there is a strong tendency in ordinary non-political working people to hold back and wait for direction from those who they may consider to be more capable or experienced, i.e., to see themselves as permanent rank and file. Coupled with this is the tendency to rally around and rely upon charismatic leaders to lead them out of the wilderness of oppression.

Movement people, including young blacks, also tend to be caught up in this "cult of personality." But there is an even more widespread tendency among young people to regard any leadership as "elitist" and "bureaucratic" and to insist instead on what they call "participatory democracy" or the uninterrupted rule of the rank and file. Although apparently contradictory, both the "cult of personality" and the "ultra-democracy" of young people actually stem from the same existentialist, ad hoc approach of movement people to revolutionary struggle. Constantly on the go from rally to rally, living for the psychological impact of each meeting on their feelings, they are not concerned with the development of collective struggle, but rather with their own momentary feelings as individuals.

The structure of the revolutionary cadre organization, on the other hand, is created to develop a dialectical, i.e., a developing, relationship between the leaders and members of the organization analogous to that between the organization and the revolutionary social forces. The important difference is that the members of the revolutionary cadre organization elect their leaders out of their own ranks, choosing those who they believe to be the most capable of guiding and directing the organization, and holding them responsible for giving such guidance and direction.

This is one of the many ways in which the revolutionary cadre organization is constantly making creative use of the dialectical interplay and tension between the two opposites, Democracy and Centralism, for its own collective development. Or, to put it another way, it is precisely because collective development is so critical to the essence of the revolutionary cadre organization that it is able to make conscious and

creative use of the interplay between the two opposites, Democracy and Centralism.

Most Americans find it difficult to understand the principles and practices of **Democratic Centralism** because Americans, generally speaking, proceed not from the concept of roles, but from the concept of rights versus privileges and prerogatives. This concept of rights, embodied in both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, predisposes Americans to regard any relationship between individuals and leaders as an antagonistic contradiction and to look at every situation from the viewpoint of the individuals preserving his or her right from external infringement.

The concept of **roles**, on the other hand, involves looking at relations in terms of the development of the collectivity, whether this be the organization, the society as a whole, or any institution in the society. At the heart of Democratic Centralism is the question:
"What functions must be performed by each part of the structure if the collectivity is to be able to act as and continue to develop into a strong nucleus of revolutionary leadership and as a framework for the continuing development and transformation of every member?"

It is necessary to have leadership within the structure of a revolutionary cadre organization because it is necessary to have some persons or a Central Committee that is playing the role of projecting and generalizing, unifying and coordinating. If there is no chairperson within a particular committee, or no Central Committee within an organization with a number of committees, who is playing this role as “center,” then there is only the plurality, the specificity and the variety of the members on the constituent committees. On the other hand, if the various members and the various committees who are responsible for specific programs, are not constantly developing their programs, are not increasing their contact with the revolutionary social forces, are not discussing issues and programs of the organization, and not developing their ability to think independently, then the unity of the organization turns into homogeneity.

This **Discipline and Democracy** are both part of the principles of the daily practice of a revolutionary cadre organization, not because they have been imposed or because they are guaranteed by statute, but because of the deep conviction of each member that these are both necessary to the development of the organization.

Every member is bound by the decision of the organization because every member realizes that without discipline, everybody and anybody could go his or her own way, do his or her own thing, and the organization would fall apart.

On the other hand, the leadership is constantly encouraging and seeking to create situations in which there is full discussion by the membership because it knows that if decisions are arrived at without the full democratic discussion and even debate of the members, the organization cannot penetrate to the issues involved in any decision or the dualities that are implicit in every unity. Leadership knows that agreement reached through a process of full discussion and debate is always more effective than agreement reached through unquestioning ascent. Leadership and membership both know that liveliness of mind must go hand in hand with **Unity of Will** if the organization is to develop. Structure should be the basis of flexibility, not rigidity.

Both leadership and membership in the revolutionary cadre organization is an art, in the sense that both leaders and members must learn to play creative roles in the development of their mutual relationship. There are no exact rules for the behavior of either leaders or members as there is in a scientific experiment, or in learning an athletic skill, where uniform conditions can be artificially set up and repeated again and again. However, experience has shown that certain procedures and attitudes can be immediately recognized as contrary to the general dialectical principles of Democratic Centralism.

For example, the "rotating chairperson" (which is often proposed in the name of "participatory democracy"), destroys the possibility of leadership playing its essential role as "center." A chairperson must hold office for a period of time long enough so that s/he can develop the responsibilities of this role. On the other hand, a chairperson who is not constantly listening to the members of his or her committees will soon be speaking only from her or his limitations and will be unable to project to the members a unity which has the richness of variety embodied in it.

A chairperson must be efficient at running meetings, but she or he must also be willing to do "propaganda work" among the members of the committee individually, in order to develop a common language with them. A leadership which resorts to agitation and exhortation of

the membership is usually one which has failed to fulfill its responsibility of projecting programs and positions which embody the relationship between what the organization is doing from day to day and the long-range role of the organization in the acceleration of the evolution of humankind.

If the leadership does not fulfill its role of projecting, creating and innovating but is only reacting to the membership, then the tendency is for weaknesses of individual members to surface, i.e., for individual members to "act up." In this situation leadership feels threatened, is tempted to overact, reminding the members of their duties and of its rights, i.e., of the chain of command, and sometimes even to mobilize those members whom it considers more loyal and supportive against those who are "acting up." But this type of administrative, disciplinary, commandist and subjectivist behavior on the part of the leadership cannot possibly restore the moral authority of leadership, since by definition the role of leadership is not a defensive but a creative one.

The organization must be constantly on guard against the tendency of members on all levels to self-cultivation, i.e., the use of the organization's resources only for the development of the individual. On the other hand, if the leadership is not playing its proper role of encouraging the independent creativity of the membership, the tendency of membership is to slip into passivity, merely receiving and supporting instructions from the leadership. As the organization then begins to stagnate, leadership again is tempted to exhort the membership to greater efforts and liveliness. But this exhortation is futile, since by definition, agitation of the members is contrary to the role of leadership, and so forth and so on.

In all these ways, through living and often painful experiences in the correct and the incorrect handling of the very demanding relationships between leadership and members, the members of the revolutionary cadre organization and the organization as a whole begin to internalize the rhythms of the **dialectical as contrasted to the administrative method**. This internalization becomes decisive in the handling of contradictions between the organization and the revolutionary social forces; both in the struggle for power and in the even more important and awesome responsibilities that ensue after seizing

power.

A (4): Standards

Every collectivity of any kind, whether an organization, a class, a race, or a nation, must establish standards, i.e., those values and patterns of behavior which all members are expected to strive to embody in their daily thinking and practice, chiefly in order to advance the collectivity. A revolutionary cadre organization, on the other hand, establishes its standards not only to advance the group but in full consciousness of the group's responsibility to advance the evolution of humankind.
Starting from the fundamental premise, a revolutionary cadre organization at this time must establish its standards in the light of two major realities: 1) the peculiar and contradictory character of the chief revolutionary social forces; and 2) the protracted struggle that will be necessary to bring about the revolutionary transformation of this society. These realities make it essential that the revolutionary cadre organization adopt as its standards those values which have proved to be most durable and universal in the course of humanity's millennia of development. Such values must include: **love and respect for one's own people,** not for their sake alone but as a springboard to love and respect other people; **respect for ideas; dedication; dependability;** and **discipline, self-reliance,** and **accountability**; **care and development of one's body as well as of one's mind**.

Young people in US today, both black and white, and particularly black, are potentially the chief revolutionary social force for the overthrow of the present society. They are the ones most hostile to the present system and the ones with the maximum energy for fundamental social change. At the same time, these young people both black and white (the latter especially insofar as they have become alienated from their communities and are imitating black radical youth), are the ones most deficient and lacking in the above values. Hence they are “now” people for the most part, standardless and valueless. Hence their “revolutionary” energies are most likely to explode in rebellions and rebellious activities of the most negative kind: dropping out, copping out, freaking out, “ripping off” and other helter skelter, individualistic and adventuristic actions. Rebels without a positive cause, they have no vision of what the struggle must be for and there-

fore no concept of the "new woman/man" who must be created through revolutionary struggle.

Typical of their inability to put the development of humanity at the center of their thinking is their endorsement and encouragement of "ripping off" merchants (as representative of the capitalist system) as if this could possibly leave unaffected the humanity of those doing the ripping off.

The result of these negative rebellions is that large sections of the population are becoming completely alienated from the perspective of revolutionary social change, either becoming passive and despairing, or in many cases, actively counter-revolutionary. Thus, instead of increasing the revolutionary potential, these potentially revolutionary social forces are actually decreasing its potential.

Most liberals, and these young rebels themselves, are reluctant to face the new reality which is being created by these negative rebellions. Instead, they excuse these rebels by saying that their attitudes and actions are "only" or "in the final analysis" the product of objective and historical conditions and therefore outside their control. They point to the post-war world of abundance and electronic media which have provided instant gratification of every physical and psychological want to the youth generation; to the barbarism of racism and the genocidal war in Vietnam which have demoralized young people by exposing the dehumanized character of American capitalism and imperialism and the American political-economic-academic power structure; and to the failure of the older generation over the years to resist this barbarism and inhumanity.

However, in citing objective and historical conditions as an excuse for the negative rebellions and rebelliousness of young people, these liberals and the rebels themselves are evading the crucial contemporary contradiction: that, on the one hand, these young rebels in their rebellions are the most complete expression of a corrupt value-free society; while on the other, they are the ones with the greatest potential to bring this system to an end. In other words, the revolutionary cadre organization cannot wait upon the revolution to change the objective conditions that have produced these social forces as they are. It must find ways and means, within the present, to bring about the revolutionary transformation of these young people in order to make the revolution, i.e., in order to bring about changes in the objective institu-

tions and conditions.

One of the most important ways that the revolutionary cadre organization can do this is by projecting and embodying in its own ideas and practices, the values which have proved most universal and enduring throughout the development of humankind; in other words, the revolutionary cadre organization itself must insist on the **indivisibility of politics and ethics.**

This indivisibility of politics and ethics is also indispensable to the development of the revolutionary cadre organization for the protracted struggle which lies ahead of it. Without the above standards, it is impossible for the cadre to develop trust in one another and from those whom they seek to lead. Without trust, no protracted struggle can possibly be successful.

In affirming the indivisibility of ethics and politics, the revolutionary cadre organization is breaking consciously with the political tradition which has dominated western thought since Machiavelli, five hundred years ago, created the science of politics as a question of strategy and tactics. Marx did not challenge this Machiavellian concept chiefly because politics was, secondary to what was happening in the process of production. There he believed, the very development of the productive forces and the struggles of the workers against exploitation, were creating in the workers the highest standards of collectivity, discipline and social responsibility. For Lenin, politics was much more important than it had been for Marx, but Lenin had conceived the revolutionary party chiefly as a means to increase the hostility of the masses to the system as a whole so that they could then be mobilized in struggle to overthrow the system.

Today, however, in the US in the last quarter of the 20th century, our historical conditions and therefore our responsibilities cannot be the same as Marx and Lenin. In the revolutionary forces with whom we are the most concerned, there is no lack of hostility and antagonism to the system as a whole. What they lack is a concept of: A) transformation of man/woman which must be at the center of revolutionary struggle; and B) protracted struggle. Together these require a new concept of the indivisible relation between politics and ethics.

A (5): Methods of Evaluation-Criticism and Self-Criticism

After the completion of every project, no matter how small, there must be a thorough-going evaluation of the project by the revolutionary cadre organization. Were the purposes of the project fulfilled? Were they dearly defined and understood by everyone involved in the first place and were they kept in mind throughout the project? Were the methods effective? Were they the best methods or the only ones that could have been chosen? Were schedules maintained and was every step of the process carried out? If some steps of the process were left out, was this harmful to the project or were some of them superfluous from the beginning? What were the achievements and shortcomings of the project, and what lessons can the group learn from it? What were the reasons for the breakdown **or failure of the** project at any point? Which of these were outside the control of the group and which might be anticipated and prepared for in the future? What were the expense and income from the project? Was strict accounting kept at every point and made available to the group as part of the final evaluation? Was every member clear about his/her responsibilities at every stage of the project? Were the resources of the group (skills, contacts, equipment, time) adequate to the project as planned, or did the group exhibit overconfidence and impatience in the planning?

This kind of methodical evaluation is a concrete manifestation of **politics in command**. In other words, it stems basically from the philosophical conviction that in all relations between human beings and their environment, human beings must assume conscious responsibility for their actions and not resort to the vulgar materialism of always blaming others or outside conditions and thus seeing themselves as passive victims.

All this may seem very elementary and common-sensical, but it is far from being obvious, either in the general overall political atmosphere of this country, or in the particular atmosphere of the "movement's" helter skelter, on-the-go politics. Americans generally tend to have a technical approach to every project, to try to overpower those whom they are seeking to influence or to defeat, by the sheer weight of their know-how and equipment. Or they have a "new frontier" approach: if something doesn't work out so well, or things go bad, just abandon the project, or the place or the people

involved in it, and go on to something or somewhere or somebody else. They are always running off to a new beginning.

Because “movement” people have failed to make serious examination of the American philosophical environment, they have simply carried these same attitudes into their own activities, simply adding their own special contempt for ideas and their love of rhetoric, their predisposition to spectacular confrontations, and their hunger for continuing emotional excitement. Engaging in activities for the sake of activism, and not in order to test dear convictions in social practice, they have rarely worked out clear programs with purposes, methods, schedules and processes, clearly defined, and therefore are incapable of careful evaluation. Hopping from one issue to the next, they have not even stayed together long enough to develop a sense of commitment to one another or to particular constituencies, which is a prerequisite to the practice of evaluation. Reared in an economy of abundance, they have little or no idea of how many working people (who have had to sweat for every dollar) judge a political organization by the seriousness with which the organization handles the questions of finances.

When one realizes how deeply ingrained these helter skelter attitudes and practices are in the objective environment and historical tradition, one realizes how futile it is to depend on rebukes and reprimands to correct them. Rather, through understanding the historical and philosophical roots of these practices, the revolutionary cadre organization can arrive at a firm appreciation of why, by contrast, it must build itself step by step on completely different philosophical foundations, based essentially on the dialectical method of development through collective and protracted struggle.

The theoretical acceptance of this dialectical method, however, by no means guarantees that the attitudes and practices so deeply rooted in the history of the country will immediately disappear. To uproot and correct these attitudes and practices on a continuing basis, the revolutionary cadre organization must include a place for criticism and self-criticism on the agenda of every meeting.

The concept of criticism/self-criticism has become a popular phrase in the “movement” only in the last few years as a result of the role that it played in the protracted struggles leading to the victory of the Chinese Communists and which it continues to play in the building

of a new society in China and in revolutionary struggles elsewhere in Asia, Africa and Latin America. As long as the revolutionary movement all over the world was dominated by the D-day concept of revolution (which had been borrowed mechanically from the example of the 1917 Russian Revolution), criticism used to take the form chiefly of post-mortem analysis. For example, one group or individual would insist that a particular setback in revolutionary developments in a particular country was the result of a mistaken policy and therefore of the group or individual sponsoring the policy. Simultaneously, the claim would then be made that if those in charge had pursued the policy of the critic instead, then there would have been success rather than failure. This kind of arrogant subjectivism and hypothetical after thinking is completely foreign to the concept and practice of revolutionary criticism and self-criticism.

Revolutionary criticism and self-criticism is based, first and foremost, on the dialectical concept of development through collective and protracted struggle. It involves the dear recognition that in every situation there is a contradiction which requires a choice between two roads, that no one is immune from making a mistake or wrong choice, but that the entire group, the individual making the mistake, and indeed everyone concerned with revolutionary struggle, can learn from the mistakes and wrong choices that have been made by the individual or group. Moreover, the recognition, the examination, and correction of mistakes and weaknesses all provide additional energy for the advancement and acceleration of revolutionary struggle. This is the dialectical concept of the “dynamic of error.”

In order for this “dynamic of error” to develop, the group must be united by certain common principles and ideas. All the members must be committed to common perspectives or a common ideology; they must share common standards, must be committed in time, and they must share a fundamental recognition of the role that struggle itself plays in developing. Without these common principles, criticism/self-criticism cannot rise above subjectivity and get to the essence of what is wrong in any particular situation, i.e., the **objectivity** of the mistake. Essential to the concept of objectivity is the recognition that the mistake is not just an accidental one, i.e., that it is not unique to the particular individual or to the particular occasion. On the contrary, it probably relates to the particu1ar historical environment or to the so-

cial background of the individual involved, e.g., intellectualism, technocratism, male chauvinism, permanent rank-and-file-ism. This objectification enables the entire group to raise its consciousness and helps others with the same background to be on the alert against specific weaknesses.

In the American social and political environment at all levels, it is very difficult to make this kind of objective criticism/ self-criticism a real part of daily life and practice. This again is for the very deep historical reasons already referred to, especially the tendency of Americans to look upon problems as nuisances and headaches, to be gotten rid of by some external means (e.g., pills), rather than as challenges from which one can learn. Therefore, the tendency is to cover up mistakes rather than to admit or grapple with them. Americans are also very preoccupied with their own personalities or individualities and inclined to develop guilt feelings about their own mistakes or as a result of hurting other peoples' feelings, by pointing out mistakes. For example, an individual may apologize for making a mistake because he feels guilty, thinking that he or she is criticizing himself or herself when s/he is really just expressing subjective or personal feelings. Often what is put forward as self-criticism is simply self-protection, e.g., when an individual rushes to admit a mistake to avoid criticism or further examination of the mistake by others.

Subjectivity assumes many forms, e.g., the protection of one's feelings or those of others; fear of hurting feelings or discouraging people by pointing out their mistakes; attacking those who hurt your feelings by criticism; fear of taking issues with others; not pointing out the person who makes a mistake or not pointing out a mistake at once but waiting until the persons involved are less emotionally caught up in their mistakes and then dealing with the question only as an abstraction and therefore without the sharpness which enables the maximum lessons to be learned by all concerned; hesitating to take issue with or criticism of the leaders; hesitating to criticize themselves for fear of undermining confidence in the organization (emperor protection); "selling" ideas to others rather than discussing and debating issues in such a way that members can make responsible choices; making excuses for oneself or for others when mistakes are made (not enough time, something else came up, conditions beyond our control, etc), thus being "understanding" and "sympathetic" rather than <u>demanding</u> on oneself

and others.

All these are manifestations of **liberalism** which is part of the very air we breathe in the US. Liberalism or the evasion of responsibility is what most Americans mean by "freedom." Freedom is the right not to be held responsible or accountable for one's actions. Since this tendency is so powerful in the society, it is inevitably present in the organization. In the past the US has been able to survive liberalism because of the unique historical conditions of this country, particularly the "wide open space" which have allowed people to pick up and leave the scene of their mistakes. Finally, however, the chickens are coming home to roost in the country. In a revolutionary cadre organization, they come home much sooner.

Liberalism leads to the covering up of mistakes and therefore to the weakening of the organization. When mistakes are covered up, they also pile up to the point where it becomes impossible to isolate and correct the specific mistakes, and the organization is in danger of breaking up in demoralization and bitter antagonisms.

The above list of liberal weaknesses, incomplete as it is, is familiar to everyone who has ever been in any kind of organization. When one realizes how many of these have characterized one's own practices in the past, it is easy to become discouraged, unless you keep in mind at all times the goals and methods to which you are committed and the collective commitment to this goal which will enable the organization to grapple with and overcome these weaknesses one by one, week in and week out, through criticism and self-criticism in the course of the protracted struggle.

A (6): Relationship With The Masses

Up to now, we have been discussing the revolutionary cadre organization's relation with the "masses" or with the "revolutionary social forces," as if these masses were "faceless masses" or as if these social forces were units of undifferentiated physical energy out in space somewhere. This is the way most radical groups talk and think of "the masses" and the "revolutionary social forces." Fortunately, their conceptions do not correspond to the way things actually are.

Actually, "the masses" and "revolutionary social forces" already are bound together in varying degrees and in different ways, sometimes

in actual organizations, more often by loose structures of various kinds. For example, people live in particular geographical areas, work at particular places, join together because of ethnic, age, sex ties, or because of common cultural, religious, political, professional, recreational, economic or community interests that can range all the way from bowling to Community Control of Schools. They may organize rapidly in response to particular issues and then separate, each going his or her individual way, or they may try to find ways and means or reasons for staying together.

Particularly in a revolutionary period like ours [the 60's], when large sections of the population have lost faith in existing institutions, the prevailing tendency in the country is **centripetal**. This takes organizational form in the tendency to form all kinds of groups. Some groups spring together as a result of spontaneous eruption or in order to make the struggle over a particularly burning issue more effective. Others are formed chiefly in order to give individuals a sense of belonging to some collectivity because they have lost faith in the nation. Others exist for no other reason than that the power structure needs them as channels of communication to the potentially rebellious sections of the society.

Because of this general self-structuring by the masses which is going on all the time, and because this self-structuring gathers momentum in a revolutionary period, the revolutionary cadre organization's relations are basically not with single individuals and never with abstract generalized masses. Instead they are usually with particular groups of various kinds which can range from political to recreational to ethnic to economic. Usually most of these groups are going in their own separate directions which may be parallel or diverging but which rarely converge. However, again because of the revolutionary character of the period, there are many reasons why these groups should or could converge to go in a particular direction together or to conflict on particular issues. Usually a particularly raw issue is enough to bring them into conflict, although sometimes a counter-revolutionary or revolutionary group may for reasons of its own seek to bring about a clash. On the other hand, it is unlikely that the many groups which have within them the potential for united action in a revolutionary direction will work for any extended period of time unless under the open or quiet leadership of a revolutionary cadre organization.

Therefore, the more rapidly various sections of the population are in the process of self-organization, the more important is the role played by the revolutionary cadre organization. In anticipation of this increasing momentum towards self-organization as the crisis deepens, it is never too early in a revolutionary period for the revolutionary cadre organization to begin the painstaking task of organizing. In fact, all previous history (including that of the US in the 60's) shows that once the dam of public confidence in existing institutions begins to break, the centripetal tendencies in the population far exceed the cadre organization's ability to provide leadership.

Relations between the revolutionary cadre organization and other organizations fall into several distinct categories:

1) The revolutionary cadre organization and/or its individual members can simply join with other organizations in a **United Front** as a member of the Front, like any other organization in the Front. This usually happens over a single, limited, momentarily very popular mass issue, usually a defense issue. In this kind of united action, the Front usually disappears as rapidly as it appeared, i.e., it is a sporadic or episodic unity that usually does not require the leadership of a revolutionary cadre organization.

2) The revolutionary cadre organization and/or its individual members can take the initiative of bringing together a number of various organizations in a United Front to carry on extended struggle for positive goals, e.g., the community control of schools in a particular district and eventually over a much wider area. In this case, because the United Front has extended time and geographical perspective, the revolutionary cadre organization must undertake to build it only after it has conducted careful advanced preparation of the constituency and has carefully trained cadres who will be able to influence the United Front and keep the struggle from disintegrating, without, however, assuming actual leadership positions.

3) Individual members of the organization can be assigned to join one or more of these organizations, not to take over the leadership, but to influence them in a revolutionary direction or even in some

cases to bring about their disintegration (if they are not playing a progressive role in the general movement), meanwhile recruiting some members from the group to the cadre.

4) Individual members can sometimes be assigned to help form a group for a particular purpose, e.g., for revolutionary study or to act as a revolutionary current within a general movement.

In all these relationships, the revolutionary cadres are always conscious of their interpenetrating role, i.e., "from the masses, to the masses." In other words, they are using their contact with these groups to get a better idea of the stage of development of the social forces as well as to influence the direction of the social forces. In this interpenetrating dialectical relationship, they never lose sight of their primary commitment to the revolutionary cadre organization and the protracted struggle, no matter how pressing may be a particular issue nor how desperately a particular community or organization may want to turn over to the cadre members the main responsibility for leading that particular community or organization.

Conclusion

In the foregoing we have outlined the fundamental dialectical principles and some of the most important concrete practices of a revolutionary cadre organization as a developing reality. If the members of a revolutionary cadre organization are not constantly striving to **internalize** the dialectical principles motivating their practices, the organization sinks into routinism On the other hand, if they are not constantly striving to **externalize** the dialectical principles in concrete practices, the principles turn into empty rhetoric.

Many of those reading this pamphlet may vigorously disagree with what it sets forth. Others may draw from it the conclusion that a revolutionary cadre organization is necessary if there is going to be a successful revolution in the United States. Not all those who arrive at this conclusion are ready to build or join such an organization. Some may be against a revolution altogether. Others may say that they agree with the ideas theoretically, but that building or joining such an organization is a job for someone with the patience and the capacity to think

more grandly. If, on the other hand, some readers decide that they do want to commit themselves to a collective and protracted struggle, they probably know one or two or a few other people who have arrived at the same point. These few people need some way to arrive at some kind of basic agreement on fundamental ideas and some knowledge of one another.

One way to do this is to form a revolutionary study group, in order to study previous revolutions and the specific contradictions in the United States which require resolution by revolution. The study of the theory and practice of previous revolutions is for the purpose of learning from them what is and what is not relevant to the specific contradictions of the united states [i.e., the relevance of a party and cadre organization). Through study of previous revolutions, we can gain an appreciation of the way in which revolutions have advanced the evolution of humankind, and therefore, a profound conviction that [our] revolution must also advance the evolution of man and woman. At the same time, through the study of previous revolutions, it should become clearer to us that **every revolution is unique**, the specific product of specific energies of specific masses, specific organizations and specific leaders in a specific country under very specific conditions, all of which have been developed over a number of years, at a particular time, in a particular historical period, and which therefore cannot possibly be repeated at another time and in another place. This general truth is of crucial importance in seeking to determine the specific contradictions requiring resolution in the United States, the first country in human history to face problems posed by economic abundance, the first people in human history to have discovered from their living experiences that material wellbeing does not necessarily bring happiness and therefore the people who have the privilege of pioneering the revolutions of the Twenty-first century.

In forming a revolutionary study group, the purpose, procedures, schedules and responsibilities of each member, should be clearly worked out and accepted by all the participants at the first meeting. It is never a good idea to leave your purposes and procedures fuzzy in the hope that thereby you will keep some people with you who might otherwise be scared off by a straightforward statement of your goals and what will be expected of every participant. Nine times out of ten, this kind of liberal attitude does to prevent the eventual breakaway of the

person or persons involved; it only postpones the crisis and makes it more painful.

A revolutionary study group should not be organized for the sake of study alone, but for the purpose of laying the basis for a revolutionary cadre organization. Therefore, participation in the group should be restricted to those ready to do the systematic work required for such a study, including reading, leading and recording discussions, disciplined attendance at regularly scheduled meeting, criticism and self-criticism, over a period of approximately six months. During this period some members are bound to raise the question of getting involved in struggle over some burning topical issue. This will be one of the group's first tests as to who, if anyone, in the group really accepts the principle that "without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary practice," and that without commitment to collective and protracted struggle, there can be no successful revolution. Anyone who is not able to refrain from involving the group in topical struggles until it has at least worked out some minimum ideological understanding, some programs of its own and some structure and standards, is not likely to be much good for the protracted struggle.

In this way, not only the material studied, but the way it is studied is itself preparation for the organization of a revolutionary cadre.

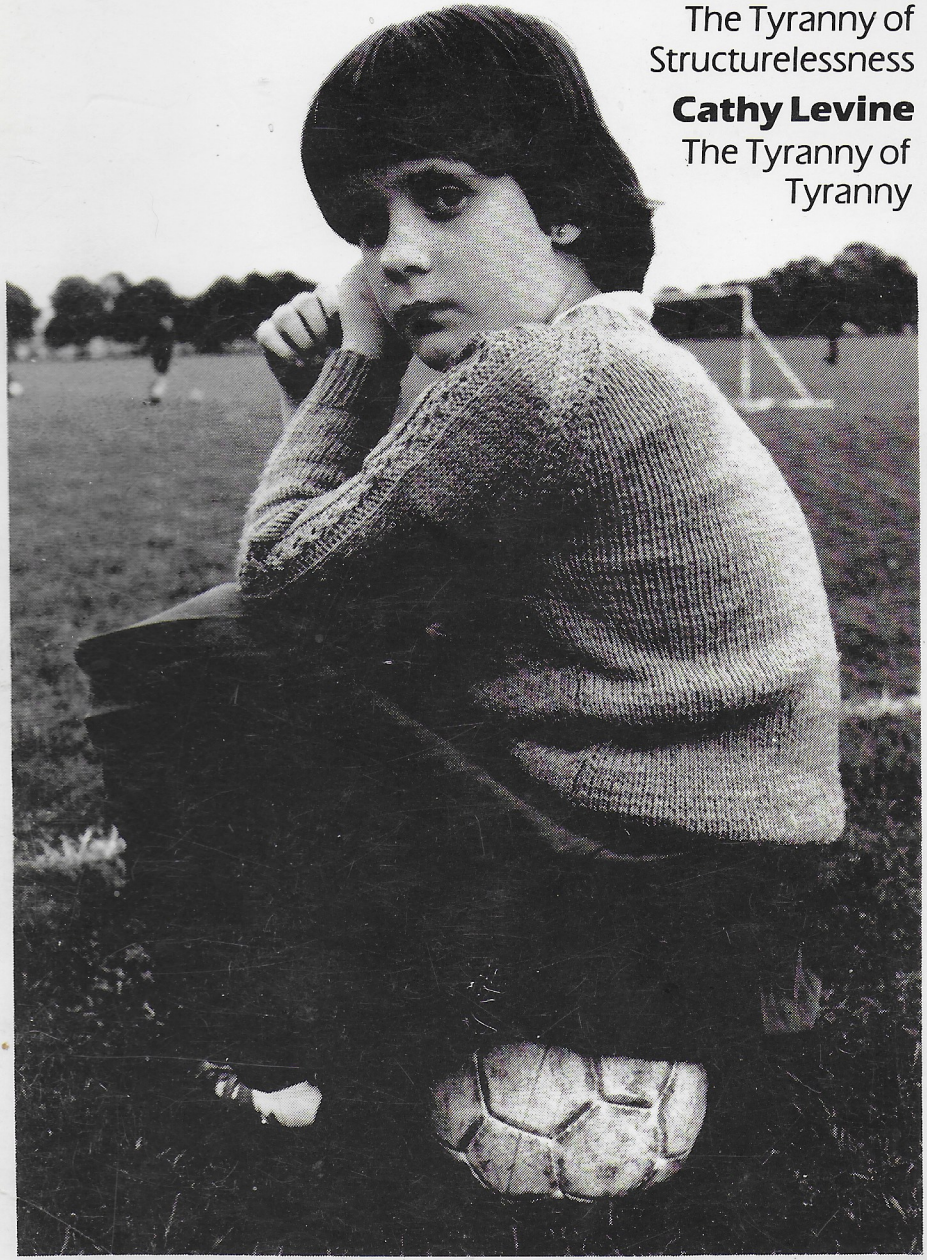


UNTYING THE KNOT

Feminism, Anarchism & Organisation

Jo Freeman
The Tyranny of Structurelessness

Cathy Levine
The Tyranny of Tyranny



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Introduction

Jo Freeman's perceptive essay on the dynamics of small, unstructured groups, and Cathy Levine's reply, were to have a profound influence not only on the women's movement, to which they were originally directed, but also on the anarchist movement in a new period of growth.

The question *how* do we organise, rather than simply why, had become of great importance. Women were aware that they had been playing an almost invisible role in the male-dominated Left. The women's movement put women in focus for the first time, and offered the chance to consider methods not just purpose, individuals not just theories. The personal was to be political from now on.

Ironically, despite the fact that these were long-term concerns of the anarchist movement, it took feminists to show how libertarian organisation could look. 'Feminism is what Anarchism preaches', wrote Lynne Farrow in 1974. A little simplistic, perhaps, but it was certainly true that the feminist practice of small, leaderless groups was an anarchist ideal.

Clearly the unstructured group had an important role to play. But at times it could be dominated by informal structures and elites, and it was often prone to internal arguments and insularity. How far, then, should the leaderless principle be taken?

This was where Jo Freeman was to challenge both the women's and anarchist movements. For her answer – a return to 'democratic structuring' for all except consciousness-raising groups – seemed to some to spell the beginning of a new and positive era, and to others, like Cathy Levine, to spell a return to the stifling bureaucratic movement-building of the past.

These articles, and the issues they confront, are as fresh today as they were when they were written in the early 1970s.

CS, 1984

The tyranny of structurelessness

During the years in which the women's liberation movement has been taking shape, a great emphasis has been placed on what are called leaderless, structureless groups as the main form of the movement. The source of this idea was a natural reaction against the overstructured society in which most of us found ourselves, the inevitable control this gave others over our lives, and the continual elitism of the Left and similar groups among those who were supposedly fighting this over-structuredness.

The idea of 'structurelessness', however, has moved from a healthy counter to these tendencies to becoming a goddess in its own right. The idea is as little examined as the term is much used, but it has become an intrinsic and unquestioned part of women's liberation ideology. For the early development of the movement this did not much matter. It early defined its main method as consciousness-raising, and the 'structureless rap group' was an excellent means to this end. Its looseness and informality encouraged participation in discussion and the often supportive atmosphere elicited personal insight. If nothing more concrete than personal insight ever resulted from these groups, that did not much matter, because their purpose did not really extend beyond this.

The basic problems didn't appear until individual rap groups exhausted the virtues of consciousness-raising and decided they wanted to do something more specific. At this point they usually floundered because most groups were unwilling to change their structure when they changed their task. Women had thoroughly accepted the idea of 'structurelessness' without realising the limitations of its uses. People would try to use the 'structureless' group and the informal conference for purposes for which they were unsuitable out of a blind belief that no other means could possibly be anything but oppressive.

If the movement is to move beyond these elementary stages of development, it will have to disabuse itself of some of its prejudices about organisation and structure. There is nothing inherently bad about either of these. They can be and often are misused, but to reject them out of hand because they are misused is to deny ourselves the necessary tools to further development. We need to understand why 'structurelessness' does not work.

Formal and informal structures

Contrary to what we would like to believe, there is no such thing as a 'structureless' group. Any group of people of whatever nature coming together for any length of time, for any purpose, will inevitably structure itself in some fashion. The structure may be flexible, it may vary over time, it may evenly or unevenly distribute tasks, power and resources over the members of the group. But it will be formed regardless of the abilities, personalities and intentions of the people involved. The very fact that we are individuals with different talents, predispositions and backgrounds makes this inevitable. Only if we refused to relate or interact on any basis whatsoever could we approximate 'structurelessness' and that is not the nature of a human group.

This means that to strive for a 'structureless' group is as useful and as deceptive, as to aim at an 'objective' news story, 'value-free' social science or a 'free' economy. A 'laissez-faire' group is about as realistic as a 'laissez-faire' society; the idea becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others. This hegemony can easily be established because the idea of 'structurelessness' does not prevent the formation of informal structures, but only formal ones. Similarly, 'laissez-faire' philosophy did not prevent the economically powerful from establishing control over wages, prices and distribution of goods; it only prevented the government from doing so. Thus 'structurelessness' becomes a way of masking power, and within the women's movement it is usually most strongly advocated by those who are the most powerful (whether they are conscious of their power or not). The rules of how decisions are made are known only to a few and awareness of power is curtailed by those who know the rules, as long as the structure of the group is informal. Those who do not know the rules and are not chosen for initiation must remain in confusion, or suffer from paranoid delusions that something is happening of which they are not quite aware.

For everyone to have the opportunity to be involved in a given group and to participate in its activities the structure must be explicit, not implicit. The rules of decision-making must be open and available to everyone, and this can only happen if they are formalised. This is not to say that formalisation of a group structure will destroy the informal structure. It usually doesn't. But it does hinder the informal structure from having predominant control and makes available some means of attacking it. 'Structurelessness' is organisationally impossible. We cannot decide whether to have a structured or structureless group; only whether or not to have a *formally* structured one. Therefore, the word will not be used any longer

except to refer to the idea which it represents. *Unstructured* will refer to those groups which have not been deliberately structured in a particular manner. *Structured* will refer to those which have. A structured group always has a *formal* structure, and may also have an informal one. An unstructured group always has an *informal*, or covert, structure. It is this informal structure, particularly in unstructured groups, which forms the basis for elites.

The nature of elitism

'Elitist' is probably the most abused word in the women's liberation movement. It is used as frequently, and for the same reasons, as 'pinko' was in the '50s. It is never used correctly. Within the movement it commonly refers to individuals though the personal characteristics and activities of those to whom it is directed may differ widely. An individual, as an individual, can never be an 'elite' because the only proper application of the term 'elite' is to groups. Any individual, regardless of how well-known that person is, can never be an elite.

Correctly, an elite refers to a small group of people who have power over a larger group of which they are part, usually without direct responsibility to that larger group, and often without their knowledge or consent. A person becomes an elitist by being part of, or advocating, the rule by such a small group, whether or not that individual is well-known or not known at all. Notoriety is not a definition of an elitist. The most insidious elites are usually run by people not known to the larger public at all. Intelligent elitists are usually smart enough not to allow themselves to become well-known. When they become known, they are watched, and the mask over their power is no longer firmly lodged.

Because elites are informal does not mean they are invisible. At any small group meeting anyone with a sharp eye and an acute ear can tell who is influencing whom. The members of a friendship group will relate more to each other than to other people. They listen more attentively and interrupt less. They repeat each other's points and give in amiably. The 'outs' they tend to ignore or grapple with. The 'outs' approval is not necessary for making a decision; however it is necessary for the 'outs' to stay on good terms with the 'ins'. Of course, the lines are not as sharp as I have drawn them. They are nuances of interaction, not pre-written scripts. But they are discernible, and they do have their effect. Once one knows with whom it is important to check before a decision is made, and whose approval is the stamp of acceptance, one knows who is running things.

Elites are not conspiracies. Seldom does a small group of people get

together and try to take over a larger group for its own ends. Elites are nothing more and nothing less than a group of friends who also happen to participate in the same political activities. They would probably maintain their friendship whether or not they were involved in political activities; they would probably be involved in political activities whether or not they maintained their friendships. It is the coincidence of these two phenomena which creates elites in any groups and makes them so difficult to break.

These friendship groups function as networks of communication outside any regular channels for such communication that may have been set up by a group. If no channels are set up, they function as the *only* networks of communication. Because people are friends, usually sharing the same values and orientations, because they talk to each other socially and consult with each other when common decisions have to be made, the people involved in these networks have more power in the group than those who don't. And it is a rare group that does not establish some informal networks of communication through the friends that are made in it.

Some groups, depending on their size, may have more than one such informal communication network. Networks may even overlap. When only one such network exists, it is the elite of an otherwise unstructured group, whether the participants in it want to be elitists or not. If it is the only such network in a structured group it may or may not be an elite depending on its composition and the nature of the formal structure. If there are two or more such networks of friends, they may compete for power within the group thus forming factions, or one may deliberately opt out of the competition leaving the other as the elite. In a structured group, two or more such friendship networks usually compete with each other for formal power. This is often the healthiest situation. The other members are in a position to arbitrate between the two competitors for power and thus are able to make demands of the group to whom they give their temporary allegiance.

Since movement groups have made no concrete decisions about who shall exercise power within them, many different criteria are used around the country. As the movement has changed through time, marriage has become a less universal criterion for effective participation, although all informal elites still establish standards by which only women who possess certain material or personal characteristics may join. The standards frequently include: middle-class background (despite all the rhetoric about relating to the working-class), being married, not being married but living with someone, being or pretending to be a lesbian, being between the age of 20 and 30, being college-educated or at least having some college background, being 'hip', not being too 'hip', holding a certain political line or

identification as a 'radical', having certain 'feminine' personality characteristics such as being 'nice', dressing right (whether in the traditional style or the anti-traditional style), etc. There are also some characteristics which will almost always tag one as a 'deviant' who should not be related to. They include: being too old, working full-time (particularly if one is actively committed to a 'career'), not being 'nice', and being avowedly single (ie neither heterosexual nor homosexual).

Other criteria could be included, but they all have common themes. The characteristic prerequisite for participating in all the informal elites of the movement, and thus for exercising power, concern one's background, personality or allocation of time. They do not include one's competence, dedication to feminism, talents or potential contribution to the movement. The former are the criteria one usually uses in determining one's friends. The latter are what any movement or organisation has to use if it is going to be politically effective.

Although this dissection of the process of elite formation within small groups has been critical in its perspectives, it is not made in the belief that these informal structures are inevitably bad — merely that they are inevitable. All groups create informal structures as a result of the interaction patterns among the members. Such informal structures can do very useful things. But only unstructured groups are totally governed by them. When informal elites are combined with a myth of 'structurelessness', there can be no attempt to put limits on the use of power. It becomes capricious.

This has two potentially negative consequences of which we should be aware. The first is that the informal structure of decision-making will be like a sorority: one in which people listen to others because they like them, not because they say significant things. As long as the movement does not do significant things this does not much matter. But if its development is not to be arrested at this preliminary stage, it will have to alter this trend. The second is that informal structures have no obligation to be responsible to the group at large. Their power was not given to them; it cannot be taken away. Their influence is not based on what they do for the group; therefore they cannot be directly influenced by the group. This does not necessarily make informal structures irresponsible. Those who are concerned with maintaining their influence will usually try to be responsible. The group simply cannot compel such responsibility; it is dependent on the interests of the elite.

The 'star' system

The 'idea' of 'structurelessness' has created the 'star' system. We live in a

society which expects political groups to make decisions and to select people to articulate those decisions to the public at large. The press and the public do not know how to listen seriously to individual women as women; they want to know how the group feels. Only three techniques have ever been developed for establishing mass group opinion: the vote or referendum, the public opinion survey questionnaire and the selection of group spokespeople at an appropriate meeting. The women's liberation movement has used none of these to communicate with the public. Neither the movement as a whole nor most of the multitudinous groups within it have established a means of explaining their position on various issues. But the public is conditioned to look for spokespeople.

While it has consciously not chosen spokespeople, the movement has thrown up many women who have caught the public eye for varying reasons. These women represent no particular group or established opinion; they know this and usually say so. But because there are no official spokespeople nor any decision-making body the press can interview when it wants to know the movement's position on a subject, these women are perceived as the spokespeople. Thus, whether they want to or not, whether the movement likes it or not, women of public note are put in the role of spokespeople by default.

This is one source of the tie that is often felt towards the women who are labelled 'stars'. Because they were not selected by the women in the movement to represent the movement's views, they are resented when the press presumes they speak for the movement...Thus the backlash of the 'star' system, in effect, encourages the very kind of individual non-responsibility that the movement condemns. By purging a sister as a 'star', the movement loses whatever control it may have had over the person, who becomes free to commit all of the individualistic sins of which she had been accused.

Political impotence

Unstructured groups may be very effective in getting women to talk about their lives; they aren't very good for getting things done. Unless their mode of operation changes, groups flounder at the point where people tire of 'just-talking' and want to do something more. Because the larger movement in most cities is as unstructured as individual rap groups, it is not much more effective than the separate groups at specific tasks. The informal structure is rarely together enough or in touch enough with the people to be able to operate effectively. So the movement generates much emotion and few results. Unfortunately, the consequences of all this motion are not as innocuous as the results, and their victim is the movement itself.

Some groups have turned themselves into local action projects, if they do not involve too many people, and work on a small scale. But this form restricts movement activity to the local level. Also, to function well the groups must usually pare themselves down to that informal group of friends who were running things in the first place. This excludes many women from participating. As long as the only way women can participate in the movement is through membership of a small group, the non-gregarious are at a distinct disadvantage. As long as friendship groups are the main means of organisational activity, elitism becomes institutionalised.

For those groups which cannot find a local project to devote themselves to, the mere act of staying together becomes the reason for their staying together. When a group has no specific task (and consciousness-raising is a task), the people in it turn their energies to controlling others in the group. This is not done so much out of a malicious desire to manipulate others (though sometimes it is) as out of lack of anything better to do with their talents. Able people with time on their hands and a need to justify their coming together put their efforts into personal control, and spend their time criticising the personalities of the other members in the group. Infighting and personal power games rule the day. When a group is involved in a task, people learn to get along with others as they are and to subsume dislikes for the sake of the larger goals. There are limits placed on the compulsion to remould every person into our image of what they should be.

The end of consciousness-raising leaves people with no place to go and the lack of structure leaves them with no way of getting there. The women in the movement either turn in on themselves and their sisters or seek other alternatives of action. There are few alternatives available. Some women just 'do their own thing'. This can lead to a great deal of individual creativity, much of which is useful for the movement, but it is not a viable alternative for most women and certainly does not foster a spirit of co-operative group effort. Other women drift out of the movement entirely because they don't want to develop an individual project and have found no way of discovering, joining or starting group projects that interest them.

Many turn to other political organisations to give them the kind of structured, effective activity that they have not been able to find in the women's movement. Thus, those political organisations which view women's liberation as only one issue among many find the women's liberation movement a vast recruiting ground for new members. There is no need for such organisations to 'infiltrate' (though this is not precluded). The desire for meaningful political activity generated by women by becoming part of the women's liberation movement is sufficient to make them eager

to join other organisations. The movement itself provides no outlets for their new ideas and energies.

Those women who join other political organisations while remaining within the women's liberation movement, or who join women's liberation while remaining in other political organisations, in turn become the framework for new informal structures. These friendship networks are based upon their common non-feminist politics rather than the characteristics discussed earlier; however, the network operates in much the same way. Because these women share common values, ideas and political orientations, they too become informal, unplanned, unselected, unresponsible elites — whether they intend to be so or not.

These new informal elites are often perceived as threats by the old informal elites previously developed within different movement groups. This is a correct perception. Such politically orientated networks are rarely willing to be merely 'sororities' as many of the old ones were, and want to proselytise their political as well as their feminist ideas. This is only natural, but its implications for women's liberation have never been adequately discussed. The old elites are rarely willing to bring such differences of opinion out into the open because it would involve exposing the nature of the informal structure of the group. Many of these informal elites have been hiding under the banner of 'anti-elitism' and 'structurelessness'. To counter effectively the competition from another informal structure, they would have to become 'public' and this possibility is fraught with many dangerous implications. Thus, to maintain its own power, it is easier to rationalise the exclusion of the members of the other informal structure by such means as 'red-baiting', 'lesbian-baiting' or 'straight-baiting'. The only other alternative is formally to structure the group in such a way that the original power is institutionalised. This is not always possible. If the informal elites have been well structured and have exercised a fair amount of power in the past, such a task is feasible. These groups have a history of being somewhat politically effective in the past, as the tightness of the informal structure has proven an adequate substitute for a formal structure. Becoming structured does not alter their operation much, though the institutionalisation of the power structure does not open it to formal challenge. It is those groups which are in greatest need of structure that are often least capable of creating it. Their informal structures have not been too well formed and adherence to the ideology of 'structurelessness' makes them reluctant to change tactics. The more unstructured a group it is, the more lacking it is in informal structures; the more it adheres to an ideology of 'structurelessness', the more vulnerable it is to being taken over by a group of political comrades.

Since the movement at large is just as unstructured as most of its constituent groups, it is similarly susceptible to indirect influence. But the phenomenon manifests itself differently. On a local level most groups can operate autonomously, but only the groups that can organise a national activity are nationally organised groups. Thus, it is often the structured feminist organisations that provide national directions for feminist activities, and this direction is determined by the priorities of these organisations. Such groups as National Organisation of Women and Womens Equality Action League and some Left women's caucuses are simply the only organisations capable of mounting a national campaign. The multitude of unstructured women's liberation groups can choose to support or not support the national campaigns, but are incapable of mounting their own. Thus their members become the troops under the leadership of the structured organisations. They don't even have a way of deciding what the priorities are.

The more unstructured a movement is, the less control it has over the directions in which it develops and the political actions in which it engages. This does not mean that its ideas do not spread. Given a certain amount of interest by the media and the appropriateness of social conditions, the ideas will still be diffused widely. But diffusion of ideas does not mean they are implemented; it only means they are talked about. Insofar as they can be applied individually they may be acted upon; insofar as they require co-ordinated political power to be implemented, they will not be.

As long as the women's liberation movement stays dedicated to a form of organisation which stresses small, inactive discussion groups among friends, the worst problems of unstructuredness will not be felt. But this style of organisation has its limits; it is politically inefficacious, exclusive and discriminatory against those women who are not or cannot be tied into the friendship networks. Those who do not fit into what already exists because of class, race, occupation, parental or marital status, or personality will inevitably be discouraged from trying to participate. Those who do not fit in will develop vested interests in maintaining things as they are.

The informal groups' vested interests will be sustained by the informal structures that exist, and the movement will have no way of determining who shall exercise power within it. If the movement continues deliberately not to select who shall exercise power, it does not thereby abolish power. All it does is abdicate the right to demand that those who do exercise power and influence be responsible for it. If the movement continues to keep power as diffuse as possible because it knows it cannot demand responsibility from those who have it, it does prevent any group or person

from totally dominating. But it simultaneously ensures that the movement is as ineffective as possible. Some middle ground between domination and ineffectiveness can and must be found.

These problems are coming to a head at this time because the nature of the movement is necessarily changing. Consciousness-raising, as the main function of the women's liberation movement, is becoming obsolete. Due to the intense press publicity of the last two years and the numerous overground books and articles now being circulated, women's liberation has become a household word. Its issues are discussed and informal rap groups are formed by people who have no explicit connection with any movement group. Purely educational work is no longer such an overwhelming need. The movement must go on to other tasks. It now needs to establish its priorities, articulate its goals and pursue its objectives in a co-ordinated way. To do this it must be organised locally, regionally and nationally.

Principles of democratic structuring

Once the movement no longer clings tenaciously to the ideology of 'structurelessness', it will be free to develop those forms of organisation best suited to its healthy functioning. This does not mean that we should go to the other extreme and blindly imitate the traditional forms of organisation. But neither should we blindly reject them all. Some traditional techniques will prove useful, albeit not perfect; some will give us insights into what we should not do to obtain certain ends with minimal costs to the individuals in the movement. Mostly, we will have to experiment with different kinds of structuring and develop a variety of techniques to use for different situations. The 'lot system' is one such idea which has emerged from the movement. It is not applicable to all situations, but it is useful in some. Other ideas for structuring are needed. But before we can proceed to experiment intelligently, we must accept the idea that there is nothing inherently bad about structure itself – only its excessive use.

While engaging in this trial-and-error process, there are some principles we can keep in mind that are essential to democratic structuring and are politically effective also:

1 *Delegation* of specific authority to specific individuals for specific tasks by democratic procedures. Letting people assume jobs or tasks by default only means they are not dependably done. If people are selected to do a task, preferably after expressing an interest or willingness to do it, they have made a commitment which cannot easily be ignored.

2 Requiring all those to whom authority has been delegated to be

responsible to all those who selected them. This is how the group has control over people in positions of authority. Individuals may exercise power, but it is the group that has the ultimate say over how the power is exercised.

3 *Distribution* of authority among as many people as is reasonably possible. This prevents monopoly of power and requires those in positions of authority to consult with many others in the process of exercising it. It also gives many people an opportunity to have responsibility for specific tasks and thereby to learn specific skills.

4 *Rotation* of tasks among individuals. Responsibilities which are held too long by one person, formally or informally, come to be seen as that person's 'property' and are not easily relinquished or controlled by the group. Conversely, if tasks are rotated too frequently the individual does not have time to learn her job well and acquire a sense of satisfaction of doing a good job.

5 *Allocation* of tasks along rational criteria. Selecting someone for a position because they are liked by the group, or giving them hard work because they are disliked, serves neither the group nor the person in the long run. Ability, interest and responsibility have got to be the major concerns in such selection. People should be given an opportunity to learn skills they do not have, but this is best done through some sort of 'apprenticeship' programme rather than the 'sink or swim' method. Having a responsibility one can't handle well is demoralising. Conversely, being blackballed from what one can do well does not encourage one to develop one's skills. Women have been punished for being competent throughout most of human history – the movement does not need to repeat this process.

6 *Diffusion of information* to everyone as frequently as possible. Information is power. Access to information enhances one's power. When an informal network spreads new ideas and information among themselves outside the group, they are already engaged in the process of forming an opinion – without the group participating. The more one knows about how things work, the more politically effective one can be.

7 *Equal access to resources* needed by the group. This is not always perfectly possible, but should be striven for. A member who maintains a monopoly over a needed resource (like a printing press or a darkroom owned by a husband) can unduly influence the use of that resource. Skills and information are also resources. Members' skills and information can be equally available only when members are willing to teach what they know to others.

When these principles are applied, they ensure that whatever structures

are developed by different movement groups will be controlled by and be responsible to the group. The group of people in positions of authority will be diffuse, flexible, open and temporary. They will not be in such an easy position to institutionalise their power because ultimate decisions will be made by the group at large. The group will have the power to determine who shall exercise authority within it.

Jo Freeman

The Tyranny of Consensus

M. Treloar

When election results were reported in Iraq in mid-October, 2002, it became clear that President Hussein could have taught President George W. Bush a few tricks about stuffing the ballot boxes. All 11,445,638 eligible voters stood by their Saddam. By definition, consensus had been reached.

No sane organization from anti-war or activist circles in the U.S. stood up to defend those results as either democratic or honest.

Yet the process by which most meetings are conducted in those same circles is as un-democratic as the charade that was conducted in Iraq.

We are referring to "consensus process". It is the current practice of the anti-war and anti-globalization movements and other progressive and radical organizations on this continent.

Almost every reader of ***Clamor*** will recognize this scene, whether they have experienced it in a black bloc of five crusty punks trying to figure out how to attack a line of police or at a gathering of hundreds of well-dressed and respectable Green Party members trying to craft a resolution to Congress. The group gathers, a proposal is put before the body, and someone interjects, "Wait, we have to use consensus process."

In its purest and most common form, it requires that ***all*** members of the meeting agree with the proposal. Those who do not agree are usually given a few options: They may block, or stop the proposal. Or they may step aside, which means that they will not stop the proposal. Or they may withdraw from the process altogether. Finally, they may attempt to come up

with a new proposal that will win the approval of the entire meeting. (We are using here the model outlined in Starhawk's ***Resources for Activism*** website. All quotes will be from it, unless otherwise cited. Most models in use are a variation of this, rather than the tedious ***Handbook on Formal Consensus*** or similar books, which are rarely used. My admiration for Starhawk's work does not change this critique.)

Consensus process is undemocratic. It is unwieldy. It is usually time-consuming. It is easily subject to the whims of the facilitator. It is frequently just another tool of manipulation when white activists work with communities of color.

It is a process that seems designed to promote disruption of meetings by individuals. In the last few months, the author of this article has seen a meeting of thirty people organizing against state repression brought to a halt by one person, new to consensus process, who invoked a principled block. In yet another meeting, this one to decide the fate of Copwatch in Portland, four experienced pacifist organizers kept a meeting of community organizers and activists for a full four hours, merely by blocking and refusing to recognize the clearly stated mandate, which had been apparent in the first half-hour. The first meeting had abysmal facilitation, with people tossing the task around the room like a hot potato; the second meeting had skillful facilitators, respected by everyone in the room, who hung in till the end.

It is also unnecessary and against the very principles of the society we wish to come into existence.

The Myths of Consensus

When large groups of otherwise rational people continue to engage in an activity without a gun held to their head, it is because they believe in the practice or because they believe in the myths surrounding the practice.

Consensus process on the North American continent is surrounded and supported by a number of myths.

Let's examine them.

The Myth of Seattle: This is What Democracy Doesn't Look Like

It is still the case, for better or worse, that many practices get over because "that's what they did in Seattle." The successful protests of the World Trade Organization's meetings in Seattle in December 1999, mark an important point in activist and anarchist organizing on this continent. It is also true that consensus decision-making was attempted in meetings of hundreds of people and affinity clusters leading up to the actions that shut down the WTO.

But what are forgotten in this myth are the numerous cases when affinity groups 'stepped aside' to allow action to occur or when facilitators and meetings threw out consensus process in order to accomplish what was necessary.

One meeting on the evening of Wednesday, December 2,1999 at the convergence space in Seattle illustrates this. A battle was going on outside on the streets of Capitol Hill, where the police invaded with pepper spray, tear gas and batons. Inside the space hundreds of people representing the remnants of many of the affinity groups that had seized the downtown a day earlier, along with the Peoples' Assembly and Seattle youth, were attempting to figure out what to do next. The mayor of Seattle had declared

a state of emergency and any marches downtown would be risking mass arrest.

While the facilitators skillfully attempted to keep hundreds of people on topic, people choking from the tear gas outside came into the meeting with what proved to be false reports that the police were coming to attack the space. Calls of "We've got to take the whole meeting to the streets." arose.

In consensus process as it is supposed to be practiced, the affinity group representatives who wanted to take the whole meeting to the streets would have been considered to be blocking any proposals then on the floor and urging a counter-proposal.

In reality, what happened was that the facilitators - correctly – let security deal with the rumors and ***ignored*** the proposal to take the meeting outside. Instead, a decision was reached to surround the jail the next day, which helped to break the mayor's ban and put thousands of people on the streets for the rest of the week. Other proposals, which had no support beyond one or two affinity groups, such as an insistent one that everyone should go out and clean up the anti-corporate graffiti put up on corporate Seattle during the seizure of the downtown, were similarly ignored. The facilitators simply refused to acknowledge that these proposals had been made.

This was ***not*** consensus process. If the 'blocks' had been recognized, we would likely still be in the meeting, three years on.

The Myth of Anarchy

A number of anarchists and non-anarchists seem to believe consensus process comes from the theory and practice of anarchy. A recent AP story about anarchists cobbled consensus together with dumpster-diving, the black bloc and Chomsky. Yet, not surprisingly, no one ever cites Goldman or Malatesta or Proudhon or Bakunin or 'the Platform' or any of the usual suspects as the source of 'consensus process'.

They can't.

None of the records of the International Anarchist Congresses of the early 1900's show the use of consensus process. All of them list votes with majorities and minorities and sharp debates.

Bookchin, in recounting the attempt to pull together an anarchist grouping in the U.S., after the implosion of SDS in 1969, gives no account of consensus process in that failed effort.

Love and Rage, the last attempt to forge a national anarchist grouping in the U.S., did not function by consensus process.

It is only in the last twenty years that consensus process has appeared as a given among anarchist circles. Food not Bombs has been a source of spreading the new gospel. For them, "anarchism and consensus go together like hot vegan soup and a good day-old bagel."

But before those good folks, the first major use of consensus process stemmed from its use at the anti-nuclear Clamshell Alliance of the 1970s. In those gatherings, consensus process was introduced from Quaker pacifist tradition, a notion that would horrify many non-religious and non-pacifist anarchists.

The Myth of Inclusivity

A major ideal of consensus process has always been: "..***all*** (our emphasis) people to be able to express themselves in their own words and of their own will."

The tedious nature of consensus process and much of the foo foo associated with it has the effect of driving away the very "people" who most desire democracy and social change.

Anyone who has ever seen a group of young, usually white activists begin to practice consensus process with all of its frills, especially in meetings where mainly working class or poor people are present, has undoubtedly witnessed a lot of "What the fuck?" looks being exchanged.

Dropping a whole new culture, with coded words such as "vibes-watcher" and secret signals, such as "twinkling", into discussions that affect people's lives, is one reason – though not the only one – that some well-meaning activists never get invited back to meet with 'real' people.

Picture a white anti-globalization activist explaining to an African American community organizer at a meeting against police brutality that clapping was "violent" and voting was "competitive". This occurred in Portland, where the liberal Democratic female mayor, a noted defender of the same police who routinely shoot Black and Latino men, has prohibited clapping at public City Council meetings and instead, has asked that the audience "twinkle".

People who have homework, one or two jobs, children or elderly parents to deal with, lovers to kiss, meals to make and eat – or all of the above - are not eager for five hour meetings, especially when two hours would accomplish the same goals.

But the alternative to ***Robert's Rules of Order*** being strictly enforced should not be a system where a clear minority must withdraw a clear position in order not to obstruct action. Sometimes minorities are proven right by the course of history. Allowing their position – and vote – to stand while a majority vote determines the group's action is a workable alternative in many cases.

Some simple steps are in order for our movements. In the Bay Area and elsewhere, anarchists and other activists have undertaken to train decent facilitators for their meetings. Recognizing the importance of this skill, which can be learned by those willing to do so, is a first step for any serious movement. Many of the techniques advocated by consensus process are worth preserving, such as those which call first upon people who have not spoken to go ahead of those who would speak incessantly.

But if the facilitators are learning a basically flawed model, even a great facilitator won't be able to preserve democracy.

Many activist organizations have recently been driven to chuck out the model of pure consensus process that this article has criticized. Pacifist and non-pacifist alike, they are moving to a much more realistic model where an ***attempt*** is made to reach consensus. Once that fails, as it frequently does, the group moves to reach a majority of 3/4 or 80% in some groups.

This model recognizes that the goal of most activist groups is ***action***. The minority is allowed to retain their position without apology and is also guaranteed a record of their position.

There is also a notion imbedded in consensus process that ***everyone will eventually agree if they talk about it long enough.*** This premise comes as a complete and unpleasant surprise to many community groups, especially those based in the working class or communities of color. These are frequently organizations that have learned by painful experience that there are clear divisions in society and some people ***will never agree to consensus*** that their wealth or power should be expropriated.

Allowing meetings where any one or two individuals, including the police who are sent to infiltrate, can outweigh the wishes of hundreds of community members seems suicidal to these groups.

So Why Consensus?

It's easy to see why consensus process was invented as an alternative and why it has such appeal to young anti-globalization or peace or environmental activists. Most of those who invoke it have attended meetings where ***Robert's Rules of Order*** was used – or misused – to bludgeon minority blocs or even majority groups that are challenging the status quo. Anyone who has seen an organization or meeting split because of a 50%-plus-one vote being enforced and leading to suppression of the minority would want a less divisive process. Anyone who has borne the brunt of tedious, long-winded harangues (usually from men) will want a more disciplined, yet inclusive process.

Democracy is not easy. Nor is it only enforceable by a written set of rules, despite our need for those. ***Robert's Rules of Order***, as any who has taken time to study their history would know, arose as an attempt to prevent "the uselessness of attending meetings which began late and dragged on…overbearing chairmen and ruthless small cliques."

Some have suggested different rules for affinity groups and collectives, which typically are small in number and demand a high degree of unity, versus organizations or coalitions, which may be hundreds or tens of thousands in number and demand less unity. If a group of five people is risking arrest or injury or prison together, then consensus makes perfect sense, as does the ability of one person to block an action. When two or three or more lovers are trying to work out their relationship, few of us would suggest taking a vote.

But when five thousand people are busting to go out on strike, then allowing five dissenters or fifty to stop it makes no sense. As those of us who have gone through such struggles know, the possibility of victory recedes fast when there is only a simple majority. It is a legitimate and not simple question to ask what should be done when there is no super-majority available, when there are 55% in favor, 40% against and 5% completely undecided. Different organizations will choose different thresholds for decision-making. Starting off with an absurd standard of total agreement will guarantee only frustration or defeat.

None of the uprisings and organizing of the past that we honor would have occurred if they had used consensus process. Whether it was the Stonewall Rebellion, the Selma bus boycotts, the Flint sitdown, the Underground Railroad, the storming of the Bastille or the high school student walkouts and sleep-ins that are happening in Portland as this is being written, we can be certain of a few things. In order to accomplish those efforts, people argued, they probably prayed and cried and, with their back to the wall, decided to act. But they didn't wait for consensus.

It is time to face this reality if we wish to change society completely.

Notes:

This was written before the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Opposing the U.S. empire does not mean we have to be blind to oppression elsewhere.

The title honors Jo Freeman's essay, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness."

This piece came out of discussion with Heather Ajani and Joel Olson of Phoenix Copwatch. Thanks to the Cobras and E.J., who correct my grammar and my political mistakes

M.Treloar is a member of Black Cross Health Collective (www.blackcrosscollective.org) , which operates by consensus process, and Bring the Ruckus, which won't.

INTRODUCTION TO STO's "TOWARDS A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY"

More than five years have passed since we first printed TOWARDS A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY. During this period many of the specific political criticisms made in the pamphlet have ceased to apply to the groups criticized. The section on the GCL (now part of the October League) is an example of such a change in position. Groups like Progressive Labor which were important in the late sixties and early seventies are of marginal importance now. The CPUSA, of course, persists, if it doesn't prevail, but a whole range of new organizations, most of them explicitly Marxist Leninist have also developed. The PSP, CASA, and the Weather Underground-Prairie Fire are the most important of these. These new groupings and pre-parties raise issues and questions which were not covered at all in the pamphlet.

Nevertheless, most of the strategic concepts which we criticize are still factors determining left politics, though they should not be. Thus, even in its original and outdated form the critical section of the pamphlet can, we hope, be useful.

During these five years our ideas have also changed. We would not write the same pamphlet today. To prevent any possible confusion, it is necessary to separate what we think is generally valid in the position advanced in the pamphlet from the aspects which we now think were mistaken.

Lenin often remarked on his tendency to "bend the stick too far" in one or another direction. His genius was that his exaggerations and distortions always were in the direction which later proved to be right for that time. Unfortunately the same cannot be said about STO's pamphlet on the party. We bent the stick too far in two areas; on the question of "party-building", and on the role of the party in the development of a revolutionary social bloc.

On the first issue nothing was presented beyond the short and facile dismissal of the GCL. It is a little embarrassing to admit that our current position on party-building bears a strong formal resemblance to the position which we ridiculed five years ago. At the time the pamphlet was written we believed that there were no real theoretical questions involved in party-building...only practical ones...and that the way to build a party was to function as a local component of one, gradually merging with similar local groups. This rather naïve perspective is apparent in the pamphlet in the dismissal of the GCL, and, more importantly, in the absence of any treatment of the distinctions between the role, the political priorities, and the structure of a hegemonic party, and the same issues when the point of reference is a communist collective engaged in the process of trying to build a party, but not in any sense close to having accomplished it. Now, we see that the current stage of party building entails a greater stress on theoretical clarity, cadre development, and socialist propaganda.

The second mistake in the pamphlet is even more serious. This relates to the treatment in the next to the last section of the party's role in developing mass revolutionary conscious and organization. The pamphlet argues:

> "The two essential parts of our approach to the transformation of groups of exploited and oppressed workers into a revolutionary social bloc have now been clarified. The characteristics of the social bloc already exist in the atti-

tudes, ideas, and experiences which are a part of the consciousness of the class. They will not have to be developed from scratch, or lectured into the workers. These autonomous characteristics are generally incorporated within, and subordinated to, the features of working class consciousness which are imprinted on the workers by the dominant ideology and culture, but the development of mass struggle tends to bring them out as competing political tendencies.

Second, the separation between conflicting worldviews is not a clear one, and, perhaps more important, it is temporary, present only spasmodically and sporadically in the heat of the struggle. As struggles subside, the characteristics which foreshadow the possibility of socialism are generally submerged, or turned into harmless formalities, as, for example: the preservation of the "brother" and "sister" form of address inside the trade unions where the actual relationships are anything but fraternal.

The basic strategic function of the party, then, is to take hold of each of these features of the struggle, clarify its revolutionary implications and the categorical nature of the break with old patterns of thinking and acting which it represents, and incorporate it into a more systematic challenge to capitalism. This is not primarily a job of agitation and propaganda, although clearly they are a part of what must be done.

The party has two main tasks: first, it must develop programs of activity and forms of mass organization which incorporate these features of working class consciousness as unifying and activating principles, as the basis for continuing the struggle. Second, the party must link these fragmentary elements together into a revolutionary dual power. In this fashion the party can begin to teach the working class that socialism is within its power."

The mistake lies in the assumption that since the two conceptions of the world within the working class can be separated for methodological and analytical purposes, the potentially revolutionary elements are, in fact, relatively separate and distinct. Though this assumption is not made explicitly, and there are numerous qualifications and warnings which go in the opposite direction, even within the cited passage, it is implicit in the definition of the "two main tasks" of the party. These two tasks show no appreciation of the fact that the struggle to project and develop the revolutionary features of the working class is inseparable from the struggle to isolate and defeat the non-revolutionary and counter-revolutionary aspects. These are two parts of the same process, but they will necessarily be in tension with each other. Dealing with one does not entail dealing with the other. The failure to make this point gives the entire perspective a Utopian and slightly spontaneist cast.

As a consequence of our revised position, we would stress aspects of the leadership role of the party in addition to those indicated in the pamphlet. While the pamphlet tends to scoff at the propaganda-educational function of communists, it now seems to us that the development of a revolutionary intellectual milieu is an extremely important task particularly at a point where the attraction and development of cadre must be a priority. In addition, as it stands, the pamphlet does not sit well with our strategic priority on confronting the institution of white suprem-

acy as the central aspect of winning white workers to a class stand. This priority clearly imposes tasks which are not adequately defined in the selection cited above.

What we still retain from the basic argument of the pamphlet is the alternative to the Stalin model of party organization and strategy. Consequently, our focus is on the potentials and problems of the development of revolutionary class consciousness and organization on a mass scale…on preparing the working class to be a ruling class…and not on the creation of a united front or popular front based on the organizational leading role of the party.

June 20, 1976

"Everything reactionary is the same; if you don't hit it, it won't fall. This is also like sweeping the floor; where the broom doesn't reach, the dust will not vanish." (Mao Tse Tung, Vol. IV, page 19)

Though it is subject to periodic crises and to progressive degeneration, capitalism will not collapse. It must be overthrown. Power must be conquered by the working class. However, a number of conditions must be met before the working class can present a serious challenge to the power of capital. The class must be unified around a revolutionary program. It must be developing a coherent alternative to the ideas, attitudes and institutions which compose capitalist culture. Finally, it must have the will to seize power, including both the understanding of how and when capitalist power can be broken, and the ideological, political, and military experience and commitment necessary to launch an insurrection at the proper moment.

None of these conditions will be met automatically or inevitably. Though workers are in constant conflict with capitalist social relations, the resulting struggles are generally fought out on capitalist grounds. Class organization and class consciousness of a sort does develop on this terrain, but it is contained within the fight for "better terms in the sale of labor power", and better conditions for the reproduction of the working population. Even when the spontaneous movement involves the great bulk of the working class, and when the interests of the class as a whole are clearly reflected in the struggles of sectors of the class, capitalism retains sufficient elasticity to contain the challenge through a mixture of concessions, diversions, and repressions. The ability of capitalism to survive the 1968 French General Strike and the whole range of struggles in this country during the thirties are examples of this resiliency.

The daily struggles of the workers against the capitalists do not develop to the point where the class is sufficiently organized and conscious to undertake the revolutionary reconstruction of society. From this it is clear that the struggle for a socialist revolution is not, 'inherent' in the spontaneous class struggle. Whether or not the circumstances and conditions of the daily conflicts between workers and capitalists develop into the basis for revolutionary struggle depends, fundamentally, on the intervention of conscious revolutionaries.

This, of course, is the basic Leninist argument for the necessity of a revolutionary party:

"The spontaneous struggle in itself is only able to elevate the class to the level of trade union consciousness — the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass the necessary labor legislation."... (trade union consciousness is the) "ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie." (Lenin, WHAT IS TO BE DONE, pages 31 & 41)

Revolutionary class consciousness must be introduced from outside of the immediate struggles of the workers, and, historically-speaking, from outside of the working class. Only a few years ago, the major sections of the U.S. left explicitly rejected the Leninist conception of a vanguard party. Now, though the debate over the necessity of a vanguard party still continues, the anti-Leninist position tends more to base itself on criticisms — often justified in our view — of the political performance of self-proclaimed vanguards, rather than on a fundamentally opposed conception of how the revolution will be made. The trend has clearly been towards the classical Leninist position. Major sections of the mass movement; e.g., the League-Black Congress see themselves as Marxist Leninists. Across the country there are numerous groups and groupings which put major emphasis on building a national vanguard party, though they have very different ideas about how to go about the task. Finally, the various existing claimants to the title of 'vanguard', the C.P., to name the largest, have grown to some extent.

WEAKNESSES OF THE CURRENT DEBATE

A growing debate about the nature and role of the party and about the path towards building it has grown out of this general trend towards Leninism. The basic weakness of this debate is its general failure to confront the strategic context, in which a vanguard party must be developed in the United States. We don't criticize those who lean heavily on WHAT IS TO BE DONE for basic arguments for the necessity of a party. We do this ourselves. But basic Leninism is the point departure of the analysis, not its conclusion. Once it is made clear that a 'spontaneous' revolution is not only impossible, but is a contradiction in terms, the question becomes how can conscious revolutionaries play their essential role in developing a mass revolutionary movement. This question demands a treatment of the existing situation in this country, a situation which is not parallel to Russia in 1903, and it demands an honest attempt to deal with the history—particularly its negative side — of those party formations which have been proclaiming their adherence to Lenin for more than half a century.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE, itself was such a concrete treatment of a definite political situation. It concentrated on clarifying the major tasks of the Russian revolutionaries, and on developing the organizational forms necessary to accomplish these tasks. The issues in the debate between the Leninists and the economists went far beyond whether or not a disciplined organization of revolutionaries was necessary. Two opposed lines of political work were involved. The Leninists emphasized introducing social democratic politics into the on-going economic struggles; linking these struggles with a frontal attack on the tsarist autocracy; placing the working class in the forefront of every struggle for democracy by any sector of the population; and, in every

area of work exerting the maximum effort to 'raise the consciousness of the workers generally'. On each of these points the economists took a more-or-less categorically opposed stance.

In WHAT IS TO BE DONE Lenin is directing his argument against those who maintain that the development of the mass movement will solve every problem, but he would be equally critical of the position of many present-day leftists who regard building a party as a substitute for a concrete treatment of the problems and possibilities presented by the mass movement.

> "That the mass movement is a most important phenomenon is a fact not to be disputed. But the crux of the matter is, how is one to understand the statement that the mass working class movement will 'determine the tasks'? It may be interpreted in one of two ways. Either it means bowing to the spontaneity of the movement, i.e., reducing the role of Social Democracy to mere subservience to the working class movement as such, or it means that the mass movement places before us new theoretical, political, and organizational tasks, far more complicated than those that might have satisfied us in the period before the rise of the mass movement. RABOCHEYO DYELO" (an economist periodical) "has argued constantly as though the 'mass movement' relieves us of the necessity of clearly understanding and fulfilling the tasks it sets before us." (Op. cit., page 46).

Lenin argues that the development of a vanguard party creates a form in which revolutionaries may "understand and fulfill the tasks" which the mass movement sets before them. He does not argue that the existence of a disciplined Marxist organization guarantees that these asks will be understood and fulfilled. This distinction must always be kept clear. Often this specific lesson from Lenin's debate with the economists is lost within a superficial adherence to arguments and formulations which have an historically limited applicability.

THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

This selection from WHAT IS TO BE DONE defines two aspects of the strategic role of the party. The party must be in close contact with the day-to-day life and struggles of the working class in order to "appreciate its tasks." Its intervention in these struggles must always be critical, because, in themselves, they are not sufficient to develop revolutionary class consciousness.

Before attempting to spell out the content of this critical role in the current period in this country, we should pose the question: what new tasks, what problems and possibilities, are presented by the present circumstances and struggles of the U.S. working class: The following five points outline a general picture which would be fairly widely accepted within the Marxist left.

1. A deepening crisis is undermining the stability of capitalist rule. The worldwide capitalist hegemony of the U.S. is crumbling under the dual pressures of the national liberation movements and the

growing competition from other capitalist states and blocs. Inside the national boundaries, the economy wobbles down a narrow path marked by too much inflation, too much unemployment, and too little economic growth — but this path seems to be the only alternative to much more serious problems.

To this must be added the accumulated costs of capitalist development: destruction of the environment, exhaustion of natural resources, impoverishment of social services, and wasteful and irrational patterns of production and consumption. These costs have long been ignored but now they must be contended with.

The policies with which the ruling class is trying to deal with the various aspects of this crisis are not working well. In many cases they appear to make the problems worse. Consequently, there are growing debates and divisions within the ruling class on basic policy. This is clearest with respect to the war in Vietnam, but it is developing in other areas, particularly as the new Nixon economic policies are beginning to make themselves felt. As the crisis develops and the limitations of the existing policy alternatives grow more obvious, such debate over policy adds the likelihood of serious political crises to the basic structural infirmity of U.S. capitalism.

One additional point must be made here. Institutions such as the Democratic Party and the trade unions, which have traditionally worked to confine popular grievances within limits tolerable to capitalism are not in good health — and no viable substitutes for them are on the horizon.

2. In more and more spheres, the conflict is increasing between priorities dictated by capitalist profit and capitalist property and the popular needs and potentials created by economic and technological development. The crisis of U.S. capitalism has created certain general grievances and exacerbated others that already existed, heightening contradictions on all issues. The national struggles of the Black, Puerto Rican, and Mexican peoples are in growing tension with the requirements of capitalist profit. The nonsense about the solutions to the needs of people being just a short-term technical problem is only heard now on isolated university campuses, engulfed in a growing tide of semi-official pessimism. The meaningless and anti-social character of most 'work' and much technology is widely appreciated. The distinction between 'rights' and political power is no longer as obscure as it once seemed to be.

3. The crisis of capitalism is not confronted by a unified and determined anti-capitalist opposition. The working class, which must provide the base of this opposition, is so split into different sections and segments that it is unable to utilize the crisis and confusion of the ruling class to its own advantage. In fact, it has trouble defending itself against the attack on real wages and working conditions which has been one main response of the U.S. ruling class to its competitive weaknesses

and its other problems.

There is no basis for the belief that the divisions within the working class will be swept away relatively easily as the contradictions between workers and capitalists grow sharper. For example, the major division within the working class the institution of white supremacy is securely based in the relative advantages in income and status available to white workers. So long as there is no direct challenge to the social base for white supremacy, and not just to racist ideas, the class struggle will be contained within capitalism.

4. Mass struggle has grown tremendously on virtually all fronts, often taking a very militant character. However, there has not been a corresponding development of struggle forms of mass organization, capable of consolidating the gains made and directing the forces released in a way which maximizes their impact. This absence is particularly crucial in the area of struggle where the class interests of workers and capitalists most directly clash — the point of production.

The lack of continuing popular participation in struggle, which truly mass organizations would make possible, increases the difficulties of unifying the sections of the working class which are presently divided from, and more or less hostile to, each other. Without such forms the mass movement takes on a sporadic character with peaks of activity in some areas cancelled out by fragmentation and demoralization in others.

5. Finally, despite the growing crisis and the heightened level of mass struggle, the great bulk of the people are still under the sway of capitalist ideology. On the surface, this might not appear to be the case since it is true that there is a growing alienation from official and orthodox values, particularly within the Black community and among the youth. And beyond this more-or-less conscious alienation, a general disaffection affects the entire working class.

However, rejection of the official culture is not usually linked to the mass affirmation of a clear positive alternative worldview and lifestyle. Though there has been a tremendous growth in the numbers of those who are alienated from major features of capitalist culture, few have sufficiently escaped from capitalist ideological domination to be able to see the practicability of an alternative society.

Certainly it is becoming less common to find workers embracing the classical mythology of capitalism: 'democracy', 'freedom', 'abundance'; 'any man can make of himself whatever he wants', etc. However, worker's alienation from this Rotarian folklore should not be romanticized into a rejection of the essential premises of capitalist ideology. Instead, the negative side of this ideology has become more evident among workers. Now, the salient features of workers' acceptance of bourgeois ideology are cynical and pessimistic variants of capitalist individualism — the main idea is to look out for 'number 1' and avoid soft-headed notions about the possibility of changes one's circumstan-

ces through cooperative and collective action. This is a short sketch of some of the basic realities which revolutionaries in this country must take into consideration. They set the context in which the revolutionary strategies of the various Leninist groups and grouplets must be judged.

CRISIS

The strategic perspective which we will develop in the course of this paper is based on the active role of revolutionary organization — on its capacity to function as the conscious component of a potential ruling class. Before going any further we should deal with an initial objection to this emphasis. Many Marxists would regard such a stress on the active and creative role of the party as voluntarism, as an idealist overstatement of the importance of the 'subjective' factors in the historical process.

Their alternative places a far greater emphasis on the 'objective' side — on the operation of social processes that are inherent in the structure of capitalism and, essentially, beyond human control. This reliance on objective 'laws of social development' is the basis of the dogged optimism of those Marxists who blithely predict their eventual triumph as if it were a matter of scientific knowledge, no matter how dismal the immediate situation is.

The CRISIS theory is the variation of this objectivist position which has the most strategic significance and the most adherents. Marxists who disagree on almost everything else share a belief in the CRISIS.

Earlier in this paper we have said that capitalism is prone to crisis, and that crises are likely to become both more frequent and more severe. But the argument which we are describing refers to a crisis of a different order — a cataclysmic upheaval in which popular ideas about the permanence of capitalism, based on illusions about its flexibility, responsiveness, and power, will he erased; and in which the almost instantaneous flowering of revolutionary consciousness and organization will occur. When the millennial CRISIS arrives, at one stroke, it will convince the working class that its interests lie with revolution, and will weaken the ruling class to the point where it is unable to effectively defend itself.

While objective processes can certainly create more favorable grounds for building a revolutionary movement, they neither guarantee that such a movement actually will be built, nor that it will be victorious. Though this may seem obvious, apparently it is not since the impending CRISIS position is the main pillar of fatalistic Marxism blurring the problems of the present with an unreasoned faith in the future. Though this position, fundamentally, is just a prop for revolutionary strategies which have more serious inadequacies, since it is so common

perhaps it should be treated in some detail on its own terms.

The first point to understand is that the capitalist class controls the state apparatus and dominates, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly, the entire institutional framework of capitalist society. This is an elementary Marxist proposition, but its implications tend to get ignored at just those points where they are the most crucial.

The capitalists also read Marx, Lenin, and Mao. To a degree they are class conscious and thus they are aware of the instability of their class rule, and have developed a variety of programs, to maintain their dominance. This does not mean that capitalist rule is purely rational and calculated. On the contrary, the partial and selfish interests of sections of the class, and the pressures of objective limitations on capitalist policy alternatives, as well as errors and prejudices, each enter into the determination of the specific content of class rule.

Despite such limitations, the capitalist class is constantly implementing programs to undermine, divert, divide, isolate, and repress any potential revolutionary opposition, and to absorb and contain this opposition's potential social base. Naturally, this is particularly true in periods of crisis.

The significance of this can be best understood, if some examples are considered. In this country during the thirties, the collapse of the economy and the unusual delay in the beginning of economic recovery raised the issue of the system's viability even to the capitalists themselves. That's one instance of a capitalist crisis. In May, 1968, in France, the general strike and occupation of the factories by the workers raised the question of power over the production process in a very dramatic way, even though the challenge lasted for only a few weeks. That's a second instance of a capitalist crisis.

What stands out in both of these cases is the lack of a serious and organized attack on capitalist state power despite what seem like ideal conditions for such a polarization and confrontation. Was this due to the fact that the objective situation wasn't sufficiently 'ripe'? Not at all. In both instances it resulted from the disorganization, division, and lack of strategic program of the working class. This is why the ruling class was able to use its control of the state to experiment with various responses to the situation on essentially capitalist terrain — social legislation, plebiscites, and elections, as well as threats of fascism. In both cases, the organizational and ideological weaknesses of the working class — a weakness that is the responsibility of conscious revolutionaries — allowed the question of whether the capitalists should rule that was implicit in the situation, to be replaced by the question of how they should rule.

Only when a genuinely revolutionary movement is the basic element in the alignment of forces will crises of an historic order develop. Why such a movement developed in Russia in 1917, but not in the cases mentioned above, is a matter for further, more detailed, investigation.

However, one conclusion is possible. Whatever the improvements in the prospects for a revolution due to the development of a capitalist crisis, these will not be sufficient to insure the victory of the working class without definite organizational and ideological conditions that have been laid prior to its onset. A revolutionary opposition with the ability and the will to fight for power will not develop by itself during a crisis, nor can it built from scratch during such a period.

For a crisis to develop into a revolutionary situation, working class activity and organization must make a sharp break with the routine of class struggle in 'normal' periods. The thrust must be towards dual power, not towards working for reforms within the capitalist framework. For workers to function as a dual power, programs and tactics which utilize the weaknesses of ALL possible policies of the ruling class, not just those which are advocated by its most reactionary sections are needed. Then it becomes possible to paralyze the legal functioning of the capitalist structure, preventing the ruling class from making decisive and determined use of its control of state power by maximizing the risks involved in all the options open to it. In this way, working class power can be extended, and the choice of the terrain of the struggle taken out of the exclusive control of the capitalist class.

If this sharp break with the normal patterns of class struggle is to occur during a crisis, the grounds for it must have been prepared by the work of the revolutionaries prior to the crisis. Unless this preparatory work is done, no structural crisis of capitalism will be matched with mass revolutionary political consciousness and organization, and the successful seizure of power will not be possible.

Revolutionaries can't afford to wait for the crisis. They must build a social force that fights for hegemony and power now, not leaving these as goals for the indefinite future when 'better conditions' arise. The issue reduces, then, to the question that we initially posed: what role should the party play in the non-revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation?

CURRENT STRATEGIC APPROACHES

The working class is in conflict with capitalism during struggles around its immediate conditions of existence before it is aware of the revolutionary implications of this conflict. Most serious Marxists agree that mass awareness of the necessity and possibility of a socialist revolution must be developed here, in the context of the on-going struggles around issues of reform. The question, then, is not if the party should participate in mass reform struggles, but how to participate, since, somehow, in the workers' struggles around immediate needs and demands, revolutionary organization and consciousness must supplant capitalist institutions and capitalist ideology. To help clarify our answer to this question, we will examine the answers, sometimes explicit, but

more often implied, of other Marxist groups and tendencies in this country.

A survey of the work of these groups uncovers a paradox. Most seem to lose their interest in socialism and revolution and their ability to criticize the mass movement from a revolutionary perspective just when they achieve sufficient influence to give their ideas some mass impact.

So long as a group has few resources, its energy is devoted to revolutionary agitation and propaganda, to refining its political principles to a higher state of purity, and to winning recruits around the edges of activities organized by others and in various hot-house left coalitions. Such groups tend to be extremely critical of every aspect of the reform struggle; goals, methods, and, particularly, leadership. Insofar as they do mass work, it is generally limited to organizational forms which they can control and from which other left tendencies can be excluded.

As such Marxist groups gain some followers and some influence, their attention turns more and more to the practical details of mass work. Distinctive principles of estimate, analysis, and perspective -for example, being 'pro-Soviet' or 'pro-Chinese' - become more the basis for internal cohesion in the group, rather than the operative substance of its politics. We can see this change in emphasis in those left organizations which have gained a national membership and influence; at present, the C.P., the S.W.P, the P.L.P., and possibly, the Revolutionary Union.

They all devote the bulk of their energies to attempts to gain organizational leadership of the mass movements and organizations. And in almost exact proportion as success is gained in these attempts, socialist agitation and propaganda is de-emphasized, and, more important, is increasingly separated from the areas where the mass work is most promising. More success leads to more emphasis on broader coalitions and less open criticism of the aims and the methods of the reform struggle from a revolutionary perspective. At this point, the left group tends to become 'responsible,' and to concentrate on guiding the mass movement towards 'tangible' victories. The most obvious current example of this transition from hysterical left to responsible 'maturity' is the change of life in the S.W.P. From everyone's favorite left-adventurist disrupters, the S.W.P. has become the left advocate of 'orderly', 'peaceful', 'legal' protest - the getters of parade permits, and the main competition of the C.P. in the search for liberal Democratic speakers at rallies and liberal Democrat names on letterheads. All of which stems from the S.W.P.'s rather dubious success in the anti-war movement.

It seems that the main determinant of the political stance of Marxist groups is their size and influence - or lack of same - rather than matters of political position, it is tempting to credit this to opportunism, but, without denying the reality of opportunism, this process is so general that opportunism of a deliberate and conscious variety can

only be a part of the explanation. The basic cause is to be found in common notions of the strategic functions of the party that are accepted by a great variety of different, even hostile, groups.

This is so despite the appearance that the problem is the tendency for Marxist groups to abandon or limit their agitation and propaganda for socialism as they gain more influence. If that were the problem, the obvious and simple remedy would be to always keep spreading the word about socialism. Let us spend a little time on this question.

Partly in response to the 'new left' critique of the C.P. which stressed the failure to be up-front about basic political positions, P.L. always took the position that the party must combine the fight for the immediate interests of the workers with constant agitation for socialism. However, this alternative to the C.P. turns out to be more apparent than real. Once the fundamental notion that the task of the party is to gain leadership of the mass movement by demonstrating the superior efficiency of left leadership in the reform struggle is accepted, it makes little difference whether or not an extra helping of socialist agitation and propaganda is added. The connection between mass struggle and socialism must be organic and political, not a mechanical literary gimmick like making the last demand on every program a demand for socialism. Unless socialist agitation and propaganda can be linked to the learning context of the mass struggle, it will amount, at best, to lecturing the workers on issues which their own experiences have not yet made real, and it will not take root. Clearly, socialist agit-prop is not in itself a revolutionary approach to mass struggle.

THE C.P. STRATEGY

Of all the Marxist groups in this country, the C.P. most clearly spells out its strategic perspective. This perspective is, of course, the 'anti-monopoly coalition,' the U.S. variant of the popular front strategy. Beyond the weaknesses of all popular front approaches which it shares, the C .P. position is shot through with an overwhelming emphasis on legal, peaceful, parliamentary forms of struggle. Unfortunately, most of the rest of the left, while differing militantly, and even hysterically with the C.P. on these tactical points, winds up with a strategy which is functionally equivalent to the anti-monopoly coalition. A further examination of the C.P. perspective will show how this can, and does, happen.

In the C.P. strategy, the party intervenes in the mass struggle in order to link the classes and strata that are objectively oppressed by monopoly capital into an anti-monopoly coalition. At first, this coalition would be organized around a basic reform program to 'curb' monopoly power, but in the course of the struggle more and more of the participants in the coalition will begin to see the necessity of a struggle for working class power. Though the anti-monopoly phase of

the struggle may win substantial victories, its most important function will be to demonstrate to the anti-monopoly front that socialism is necessary, that...

". . . restraints upon monopoly are not enough. . .capitalism itself must go." (Communist Party Program, page 91)

The C.P. perspective is divided into two distinct parts. First, a broad coalition is organized. This coalition seeks 'to curb monopoly' It is not socialist or even implicitly anti-capitalist. Second, the development of this coalition makes it possible for the party to successfully raise the issue of the necessity and possibility of a socialist revolution. Two questions come up immediately: how is this anti-monopoly coalition to be formed, and how will it he transformed into a revolutionary anti-capitalist force?

The C.P. argues that the formation of the anti-monopoly coalition is an absolute necessity, not just a desirable goal. The strategy hinges on its attainment.

"... a popular alliance against monopoly by all who are oppressed and exploited by it. . . is a vital strategic goal." (Program, page 82)

Since the formation of the coalition is so vital, the question of how (and whether) it may be formed becomes an urgent one. Frankly, we doubt whether such a coalition is possible on any but an anti-capitalist, not an anti-monopoly, basis in the U.S. However, for the sake of the argument, let us assume that it is possible to develop an anti-monopoly coalition. Unifying these disparate elements with such major internal contradictions will depend heavily on the ability of the party to pull the major components of the coalition together. The popular fronts formed periodically in Europe are as close as any real political movements have come to the anti-monopoly coalition, and these have only formed where the Communist parties had organizational control of the constituent elements. In other words, the only plausible road to the anti-monopoly coalition depends on the C.P.'s winning stable organizational control over the most important elements of the desired coalition, and, in particular, over the trade unions.

A number of problems are presented by this reliance on organizational control. It provides a strong pressure towards maneuvering and manipulating, towards unprincipled and, in our view, ultimately self-defeating alliances and arrangements. The whole period of uneasy alliance between the C.P. leadership and the CIO 'center' during the late thirties and early forties provides many examples of this.

The problem for the C.P. is that it must compete for mass leadership on essentially reformist grounds - who can ‘win' the most - in order to make the first steps toward implementing its perspective. This entails a general exaggeration of the importance of reform victories and thus attempts to steer struggles into areas were the victories come easier because the power of capital is less endangered. It leads

to the path of least resistance, lowest common denominator mode of organizing; to caution and conservatism; to a glorification of the routine conflict between labor and capital; to a picture of the struggle progressing inexorably 'step by step' - just as rapidly as is 'realistic.'

In short, the obstacles to forming the anti-monopoly reform coalition are so great that the C.P. is forced into reformism in order to maintain that its position is even plausible. (Not that this is the cause of the C.P.'s reformism, of course.) There is no way that the C.P. can gain stable organizational control over the diverse mass movements and struggles which, it maintains, must be pushed into the anti-monopoly coalition and still carry out the essential responsibility of clarifying the limitations of the reform struggle. This is a brief sketch of the difficulties involved in forming the anti-monopoly coalition. However, there is still the second, and more difficult problem confronting the C.P. - how does it propose to transform an anti-monopoly reform coalition into a force for revolution?

The C.P. makes its position on this issue perfectly clear:

> "The struggle for socialism — the ultimate aim — is inherent in the struggle against the main opponent of that goal - monopoly capital. Every gain wrested from monopoly capital, small or large, strengthens the forces of socialism. . . Through immediate struggle workers organize and learn the need to battle further. They learn who the enemy is and how to fight ultimately to the socialist revolution." (Program, page 83)

Presumably, the workers will 'learn' from the struggle that a socialist revolution is necessary and possible. Involvement in successful struggles for one demand create the understanding of the next demand, and so on...up to the understanding of the necessity of a struggle for state power.

Since the party is given a necessary role in this process, the position is not a classical case of reliance on spontaneity. To be sure, the role of the party is not to organize the workers as a revolutionary class. Mere participation in the reform struggle is held to be sufficient to accomplish that task. The party's role, then, is to insure the maximum mobilization and unification around each particular struggle in order that the maximum number of people may 'learn' through their participation what is to be done next. It is assumed that the lesson which eventually will be learned is, 'how to fight ultimately to the socialist revolution.'

In practice the role of the C.P. is to move all struggles to the right by pushing common denominator tactics and demands; that is, tactics that are more 'legitimate', and demands which are more 'realistic.' For some reason this is seen as fighting for the maximum breadth to the movement, though amorphousness is a more accurate description than breadth for what actually results. In any case, given such a conception of the role of the party, the C.P. must regard any projection of the necessity of a socialist revolution within the framework of the reform struggle, not as an obligation, but as an unnecessary danger

of 'narrowing' the struggle.

However, if the goal of a socialist revolution is not projected within the struggle for immediate demands, how will its possibility and necessity ever be understood? And who will project such a goal, if not the revolutionaries? The only possible conclusion is that the C.P.'s general stance is wholly reformist. It is in basic conflict with the Leninist position that the essence of the vanguard role of the party is the development of a coherent revolutionary critique of the spontaneous mass movement. This unique responsibility of the party is what the C.P. sacrifices in its perspective.

'IMITATORS' OF THE C.P. (I)

The reason for giving such attention to the C.P. perspective is that, as has been said earlier, much of it is accepted by other Marxists whether they realize it or not. This similarity emerges more clearly, if we consider the two fundamental parts of the C.P. strategy in detail. These two parts are, first, the 'two-stage' position which holds that a certain development of the mass struggle for reforms is the absolutely necessary (and sufficient) organizational and ideological precondition for a mass struggle for socialism; and second, the position that the workers will 'learn from the struggle.'

The Bay Area Revolutionary Union (now a national organization) puts forth a strategy of 'UNITED FRONT AGAINST IMPERIALISM'. Obviously, the united front in this case is directed, not against imperialism as such which is nothing but contemporary capitalism, but rather against certain imperialist policies. This is clear in the context of the R.U.'s argument that the immediate task is to:

> "unite all who can be united...around the minimum anti-imperialist program...short of the dictatorship of the proletariat,"...(Red Papers II, page 10). (a minimum program involving)...opposition to the ruling class policies of aggression, war budgets, and militarism...(and)...a determined struggle against monopoly profits. (Red Papers II, page 17.)

Unity around such a program is nothing more or less than the C.P.'s unity of the 'victims of monopoly', and it is open to exactly the same criticisms which we have just made.

The 'united front against imperialism' boils down to the C.P.'s alliance of all those oppressed and exploited by monopoly. Just as with the C.P., the R.U.'s preoccupation with the mechanics of unity a-round a lowest common denominator program stands in the way of the concrete analysis of the constituencies which it hopes to unite, and, particularly, of the nature and the implications of national and sexual divisions within the working class.

It would be silly to deny the major political differences between the C.P. and the R.U. The point is that, despite other differences, this basic similarity in strategic perspective puts them both under a similar pressure towards reformism - at least to the extent that the

perspectives are actually implemented. In practice, this essential similarity can be seen in the approach of both organizations to production organizing and the trade unions.

Both the C.P. and the R.U., in fact all stage theory strategies, see the primary immediate task of the party as the development of a reform coalition around the working class - as 'gaining allies' for the working class. We see the primary immediate task of the party as the unification and organization of the workers as a class. The C.P. and the R.U. do not deny that the development of a revolutionary working class is a responsibility of the party at each stage of the struggle. We don't deny that multi-class coalitions can be important. However, one or the other must be subordinated. The party can't have two 'primary immediate tasks.'

Either the primary responsibility of the party is to work in the reform struggles in order to organize the workers as a class or it is to work to unify the various reform struggles into a broad coalition major steps towards development of a mass revolutionary working class movement are the condition for the viability of any broad coalitions - except those which follow the model of modern social democracy - or the development of a broad reform coalition is the condition for major advances towards a mass revolutionary working-class movement. On both propositions, we maintain the former, and ay stage theories maintain the latter. When you get down to specifics about how the party should function in the mass movement, and how it should be organized, this distinction becomes very important.

'IMITATORS' OF THE C.P. (II)

To our knowledge, only the C.P. and the R.U. have spelled out a stage theory, although it is true that the practical work of other Marxist groups seems to imply that position. For example, despite the thousands of works the S.W.P. has written attacking 'popular frontism', its attitude towards the anti-war and women's movements clearly fit within the stage theory framework.

However, of the two related mistakes in the C.P. strategy, the stage theory is the least important. The fundamental error lies in the notion that the struggle for socialism is 'inherent' in the struggle against the main opponent of socialism - that in the struggle against capitalism the workers will learn both the necessity and the possibility of socialism. Variants of this 'learning from struggle' notion are much more widespread in the left than stage theories, in spite of all the bows in the direction of WHAT IS TO BE DONE.

It is clearly true that workers 'learn' from struggle. The question is what do they learn and from which kinds of struggles. Few Marxist groups share the C.P.'s social democratic emphasis on what can be learned by the participants in successful reform struggles. In fact,

the argument is often advanced that the workers will best 'learn' when unemployment increases, or when they are involved in struggles where their heads get beaten a little. This peculiar notion is the basis of a lot of crazy arguments for militance and confrontation. But it is just not true that either a general deterioration of social conditions or the frustration of the struggle for immediate demands will necessarily lead to the consciousness of the need to fight for a revolution. Attempts to provoke confrontations with the state before proper grounds have been created for such tactics, are more likely to lead to mass defeatism and cynicism and the loss of credibility for the 'revolutionary' leadership, than to the smashing of reformist illusions about the neutrality of the state. Thus it makes little difference whether the development of revolutionary class consciousness is pictured as the fruit of reform victories or of reform defeats - of successful struggles or of struggles which are repressed - both are equally misleading half-truths.

Those who participate in struggles for immediate demands are provided a social base for different, and even contradictory conceptions of reality. Capitalism is sufficiently flexible to suppress mere confrontations and to absorb mere reforms. Any given struggle does 'teach' its participants, but it doesn't teach all of them the same lessons. Sections of the working class may learn something about what is to be done through the reform struggle, but they may also learn - and clearly have to some extent - that they can live with, and within, the system.

Every struggle creates the possibility for the development of class consciousness, regardless of whether or not it attains its stated demands. But the degree to which this possibility is realized depends on the role of the party. If this role is limited to using organizational influence to channel the mass struggle in directions where the 'right' lessons will be learned, the party is bound to be unsuccessful.

In fact, this channeling approach to the party's role dominates most Marxist notions of the party. Instead of the party introducing a different quality into the mass struggle through the direct confrontation of the ways in which capitalist culture determines the ideas and actions of the workers, the party's work is confined to 'pointing' the struggle in the proper direction - perhaps, towards the anti-monopoly coalition, or, maybe towards 'demands which can't be won under capitalism.'

This stress on the demands of the mass struggle and their attainment or non-attainment, rather than the content and forms of the struggle is a technical, social-engineering approach to political work.

The following extended section from the well-known European Marxist, Ernest Mandel, shows more concretely how this mistaken conception of the role of the party is expressed. (The S.W.P. counts Mandel as one of 'their' theoreticians.)

> "The American workers go along with this whole system, not in the first place because they are intoxicated with the ideas of anti-communism. They go along with it because it has been capable of delivering the goods to them over the last 30 years. The system has been capable of giving them higher wages and a higher degree of social security. It is this fact which has determined social stability. Once the system becomes less able to deliver the goods, a completely new situation will occur in the U.S.
>
> Trade union consciousness is not only negative. Or to formulate this more dialectically, trade-union consciousness, in and by itself, is socially neutral. It is neither reactionary nor revolutionary. It becomes reactionary when the system is capable of satisfying trade union demands.)It creates a major revolutionary potential once the system is no longer capable of satisfying basic trade union demands. Such *a* transformation of American society under the impact of the international competition of capital is today knocking at the door of U.S. capitalism.
>
> As long as socialism and revolution are only ideals preached by militants because of their own convictions and consciousness, their social impact is inevitably limited. But when the ideas of revolutionary socialism are able to unite faith, confidence, and consciousness with the immediate material interest of a social class in revolt - the working class, then their potential becomes literally explosive." (Ernest Mandel, WHERE IS AMERICA GOING?, page 15.)

This selection illustrates how mistaken conceptions of the role of the party grow out of the traditional Marxist maladies of fatalism and determinism. But before pointing out how this is the case, it is necessary to deal with some factual errors in the selection.

Any accurate knowledge of the changes in the actual conditions of the U.S. working class over the past thirty years contradicts his assertion that this has been a period of steady improvements in terms of wages and 'social security.' Such an argument has plausibility only terms of wages. It is absurd in terms of 'social security.' Since the end of the CIO organizing period, despite the absence of any protracted period of high unemployment, the development of technology and the erosion of working conditions have caused a general decline in the social security of workers. So far as wages are concerned, the regular increases have been concentrated within the minority of workers belonging to the trade unions, and, particularly, within that still narrower section which constitutes the U.S. aristocracy of labor. In fact, during the better part of the last decade, including the middle sixties with their record level of profits, real wages have been stagnant or declining although this was just the time when, in Mandel's phrase, capitalism was best able to 'deliver the goods.'

The fundamental strategic thrust of Mandel's argument is contained in the following sentences:

> It (trade union consciousness) becomes reactionary when the system is capable of satisfying trade union demands. It creates a major revolutionary potential once the system is no longer capable of satisfying basic trade union demands. (Ibid.)

It is not just nitpicking to point out that Mandel's argument should rest on what capitalism actually does or does not do, not on what it is 'capable' of doing. His simplistic determinism leads him to argue as if class actions were a straightforward reflection of economic necessity, but, as we have just mentioned, the last few years are a fine example of a period when the system was quite capable of making concessions, but, generally speaking, did not make them.

There is another bit of sloppiness in these two short sentences. When speaking of the past, Mandel refers to a period when 'trade union demands' have been satisfied, but when speaking of the future, he talks of *'basic* trade union demands' which can't be satisfied. Just what is meant by the insertion of the word 'basic' is never made clear - and for a good reason. If we consider any trade union demand which may plausibly be considered 'basic' - the demand for a 'living' or 'fair' wage, as opposed to a wage increase; the demand for workers to have a property right in their jobs, as opposed to mere better conditions, then we must conclude that capitalism never has, and never will, satisfy the substance of basic trade union demands because these mirror in 'a distorted way needs of the workers which can only be insured by their control over the process and means of production. At the height of many major struggles these basic demands manifest themselves, but, because they are utopian within the framework of trade unionism, they are pushed into the background as the struggle is blunted and absorbed with less significant concessions, a lot of capitalist propaganda and, perhaps, some selective repression.

We are left with a simple proposition. U.S. capitalism is supposedly leaving a period when the ruling class met the demands of the working class and entering a new period in which it will not, and cannot, meet these demands. This transformation in objective conditions, in itself, will change a basically conservative reform struggle into a revolutionary struggle. This is Mandel's strategy, and a lot of others have ideas which are very similar.

However, it is nonsense. There will never be a time when the capitalist class has no flexibility, when its only weapon is repression. Capitalism is always able to satisfy some trade union demands, but is never able or willing to satisfy all of them. If we drop the semantics from Mandel's argument it reduces to a simple CRISIS theory of the sort discussed earlier. And, if we allow Mandel to talk about a period when the trade union movement is raising 'basic' demands, then he must explain something he does not and cannot do - how the trade union movement can be steadfastly organized around such demands, before the bourgeois consciousness of the working class - trade union consciousness, according to Lenin – is supplanted by revolutionary class consciousness.

Mandel is putting forth the traditional Trotskyist variation of

learning from struggle which is based on so-called 'transitional demands', demands which supposedly will clarify the limits of capitalism. Essentially, this is another argument that workers, will learn that socialism is necessary and possible through the unsuccessful pursuit of reform objectives. In this framework, once U.S. capitalism loses its world-wide hegemony, all that the party will have to do is raise the red flag and the workers will rally around, since, supposedly, they have learned that they can and must make a revolution through experiencing failure in the struggle for more limited goals.

This mechanical dismissal of the necessity for a party to challenge the dominance of capitalist ideology over the workers, underlies Mandel's peculiar - for a Leninist - treatment of trade union consciousness. He argues that it is 'reactionary' or 'revolutionary' depending on the willingness of the ruling class to meet trade union demands.

The first thing that must be said about trade union consciousness is not that it is 'reactionary' or 'revolutionary', but that it is bourgeois. Trade union consciousness is a relatively coherent set of ideas based on the 'interests' of groups of workers within the framework of their general subordination to, and acceptance of, capitalism. It is one way that capitalist ideology is reflected within the working class. (In this country, white chauvinism is another way.) Trade union consciousness is always reactionary in the sense that it is always capitalist, and must be confronted with, and supplanted by, an alternative ideology based on the interests and potentials of the workers as a class, not as a collection of individuals and interest groups.

Trade union consciousness is not the totality of the actual consciousness of workers. It is only one aspect, although an important one, of a general consciousness which is an amalgam of fragmentary and contradictory elements - some reflecting the worst of capitalism, but others foreshadowing the potential of the working class to revolutionize society. It is this general consciousness which can, with some truth, be described as both reactionary and revolutionary.

We are not speaking as moralists when we say trade union consciousness is always reactionary. It would be mistaken and meaningless to condemn it, since it is a spontaneous outgrowth of workers' struggle against capital for 'better terms in the sale of their labor power.' On the other hand, this limited consciousness must be transcended before the working class can become a revolutionary force. To put it more accurately, the process of transforming trade union consciousness is an aspect, and an essential one, of the development of the working class into a revolutionary class, in fact as well as potential.

Depending on the conditions, the struggle for immediate needs

can create more or less potential for the development of revolutionary organization and consciousness, and can have more or less clear revolutionary implications. But no set of objective conditions by themselves will transform the reform struggle into a struggle for power. That rests, as we have said, on the work of the party. Mandel's determinist and mechanical treatment of the impact of external circumstances evades any treatment of this necessary process of transcending trade union consciousness and the entirety of capitalist culture.

PARTY BUILDERS

Before presenting our alternative to the strategic positions we have been criticizing, it is necessary to deal with a semi-strategy which has some support among newer sectors of the U.S. Marxist left. We have argued earlier that many of the small Marxist groups which push a more 'pure' revolutionary line should not generally be taken at face value. Their concern with doctrine and principle is the only way for them to maintain their distinctive organizational identity, and thus their members.

However, this is not an adequate treatment of the argument expressed by many of these groups that building a national vanguard party is the necessary first step for any strategy - that the development of such a party is the main present task, and any attempt to provide revolutionary leadership for the mass struggles of the working people must be subordinated to this priority. The Georgia Communist League provides a representative statement of this position:

> We think that the development of a Marxist-Leninist program (a basic political program which understands the contradictions in the U.S. society, which clearly defines the aim or direction in which the society is inevitably going, and a strategy for revolution - a plan of action) is the principle task of Marxist-Leninists in the United States. This is the work to which we should devote our major efforts...
>
> On the other hand, this cannot be separated from the practical aspects of building a party - even though our practical tasks must assume a secondary nature…The main aspect of our practice should be directed towards establishing links with the most advanced sectors of the working class. These advanced proletarians are open to grasping Marxism-Leninism and becoming communist vanguard fighters...The secondary aspect of practical activity at this time is the task of communists to lead mass struggle and educate the masses of workers. (Georgia Communist League, THE VANGUARD PARTY, page 9.)

What is the picture presented here? The primary task is to develop a basic political program. As set out here, this is primarily a theoretical task, involving a relatively few trained communist intellectuals. Practical work is secondary and has two parts. First, is the recruitment of advanced workers, presumably through the attraction of the clear revolutionary program; and, second, is to 'lead the mass struggle and educate the masses of workers.' This last aspect - 'to lead the mass

struggle...' is given the lofty status of the least important part of the secondary aspect of the total work.

It is difficult to conceive of more mechanical priorities. Without involvement in the mass struggle, what is the criteria of validity of the political program; how would the advanced proletarians be discovered; how would the communist vanguard fighters be tested? No vanguard party can be built according to the G.C.L. blueprint - the Socialist Labor Party, perhaps, or, more likely, Technocracy, Inc.

Mass work is fundamental to the very nature of the party. To paraphrase the Manifesto, the communists are the section of the class that represents the interests of the future in the movements of the present; that represent the interests of the whole class in struggles of sections of the class; and that always bring the property question to the fore in the mass struggle, no matter what the stage of its development. Each of these functions presuppose that communists are deeply involved in the mass movement. The G.C.L., however, would leave such tasks to whatever spare moments weren't required by 'important work.'

Obviously, the G.C.L. position is a reaction against some of the perspectives we have been criticizing. Many of these propose functions and responsibilities for the revolutionaries that amount to being the best reformists in the reform struggle. All substantive distinction between a revolutionary and a reformist approach to the mass movement is erased. The response of the G.C.L. and similar groups to such reformism is that revolutionaries should have nothing to do with the mass movement because they could only play a reformist role at the present time.

The G.C.L. goes beyond the position that attempting to provide revolutionary leadership for the mass struggle is the 'least important' task. The basic thrust of its argument is not just that involvement in the mass struggle is relatively unimportant, but that it is a positive danger. This comes through most clearly in their criticism of reliance on spontaneity. Lenin is invoked as the authority and made to say that:

> Hence, our task, the task of Social Democracy, is to combat spontaneous trade unionist striving.' (THE VANGUARD PARTY, page 12.)

From this passage it appears that Lenin was proposing to 'combat' the reform struggles of the masses of the people. Since this would be as fruitful as combating the passage of time, those of us who are convinced of Lenin's good sense will be comforted to find that this is not what Lenin actually said in the passage the G.C.L. cites. He actually wrote:

> 'Hence our task, the task of Social Democracy is to <u>combat spontaneity</u>, to divert the working class movement from this spontaneous trade unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie.' (WHAT IS TO BE DONE, volume V, page 384, Collected Works. Lenin’s emphasis.)

The G.C.L. document omits the very phrase which Lenin thought it necessary to emphasize.

It is impossible to read an unexpurgated version of this passage or the whole of WHAT IS TO BE DONE, without seeing that Lenin was not arguing against participation in the mass movement. Obviously, his goal was social democratic hegemony over the mass movement. He argued that, since the mass movement would not develop a revolutionary trajectory by itself, the party must intervene in order to ideologically and programmatically 'divert' the mass movement from under the hegemony of that era's reformists and their intellectual apologists, the economists.

Also in opposition to the G.C.L. , which worries that attempts to 'educate the masses of workers' would be a diversion from more important tasks, before a national party had been built in Russia and when resources were extremely scant, Lenin asserted:

> 'Every effort must be made to raise the level of consciousness of workers generally.' (WHAT IS TO BE DONE, volume V, page 384, Collected Works.)

Perhaps it is beside the point to argue about what Lenin really said - or what he really meant. After all, the real issue is not the distortions of Lenin, but the presuppositions which led the G.C.L. to over-edit WHAT IS TO BE DONE. Most important of these presuppositions is the notion that the spontaneous struggle will corrupt revolutionaries who participate in it. Such a position leads the G.C.L. to absurd stands:

> 'The most militant class conscious trade unionism is not a 'step towards' communist ideology, but is in essence the opposite of it.' (VANGUARD PARTY, page 12).

First we had Mandel attempting to make militant trade unionism revolutionary, now we have the G.C.L. attempting to picture it as counter-revolutionary. In fact, it is neither. The basis for positions like that of Mandel is easy to understand, but it is hard to see how the G.C.L. can so easily conclude that it is better for the revolution if the workers are passive, than if they are organized and fighting as 'militant class conscious trade unionists.'

There is some irony involved in the constant polemics of groups like the G.C.L. against the reliance on spontaneity. What is their abandonment of the mass movement to the leadership of all sorts and varieties of reformists, while attacking reformism in obscure little publications and isolated circles of leftists except reliance on spontaneity? Isn't the development of the mass movement itself being relied upon to weaken the hold of bourgeois ideology and reformist leadership over the masses of the working class? If this is not the case, then the G.C.L. neglects to tell us how the process will actually work — unless we are to believe it will happen through individual conversions of individual workers.

The G.C.L. is reluctant to participate in the mass struggle until

conditions ripen to the point where they could win an absolute majority on a vote between socialist revolution and capitalist reform. By then, of course, most of the political work involved in transforming a divided and subordinated non-revolutionary mass of workers into a unified revolutionary working class would be finished, and the participation of the G.C.L. would be quite superfluous.

SUMMARY OF OTHER APPROACHES

The strategic positions dealt with up to this point have all capitulated to the difficulties of transforming a non-revolutionary working class into a revolutionary force. Some did this by exaggerating the extent that changes in the structure of capitalism will change the terms of the class struggle. Some did it by expecting too much from organizational leadership of the mass movement for reforms. Some did it by hoping, foolishly, that the workers will rally around any group that speaks the revolutionary truth. None of these approaches will work and neither will any combination of them.

Despite the differences between these various Marxist perspectives, they share a common element. Since they all oversimplify the actual relationship between the ideological-cultural superstructure of society and the socio-economic base of it, they all are able to pass lightly over 'false consciousness' and 'divisions' in the working class without dealing with the content or the existing attitudes, values, ideas, and actions of the workers) Alter all, as the argument goes, either the development and resolution of economic contradictions, or the inherent logic of the class struggle, or some combination of the two, will wash out the illusions, prejudices, and errors from the workers' heads, and the divisions from their ranks, leaving a united revolutionary class.

It would be very convenient, if this were the way that things happened. Unfortunately, it is not. Masses of workers will continue to think and act as if capitalism would be here forever, until their experiences convince them that a socialist alternative would work and is within their power. This knowledge will not come through the routine struggles against oppression and exploitation. It is as simple as that.

Organizing the workers as a class is not a matter of coercing and cajoling them into 'doing the right thing'. It is a process, fundamentally of developing individuals and collectives that are able to work critically and self-consciously — that are able to set their own goals and work out their own projects for achieving them. Of course it is just this kind of experience which makes workers aware of their own potentials, and turns socialism from an abstraction into a real and attainable goal.

AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY

Most of this paper has been devoted to criticizing strategic positions which fail to deal theoretically and programmatically with the

fundamental dilemma facing U.S. Marxists — the absence of the mass working class consciousness and organization which is the necessary base for development of a serious challenge to capitalist political and military power and cultural dominance. The time has come to begin to lay out an alternative to those positions.

Most Marxists, including most of those we have been criticizing agree that the struggle for socialism must be developed out of the spontaneous attempt of the working class to resist or alleviate capitalist exploitation and oppression. As was said earlier, mass consciousness of the necessity and possibility of a socialist revolution and a socialist society must be built on this base of struggle through
the intervention of a disciplined Leninist party with a definite political program. The question is not where to begin, but how to proceed — not whether the party should intervene in the mass struggle, but how it should intervene.

At the present, most of the resistance to capitalism in this country does not take the form of mass movements. Thus the party must assume some responsibility for the translation of individual resentment and resistance into collective action. The crucial issue, however, is the content of the party's intervention into the struggle, whether the party has had a hand in its initiation.

In our view, the primary role of the party in the mass movement is to discover and articulate the patterns of thought, action, and organization which embody the potential of workers to make a revolution. These patterns are manifested, embryonically, in the course of every genuine struggle. This characteristic content of mass struggle provides the only possible social basis for integrating the experiences of masses of workers into a coherent revolutionary ideology and culture.

The real work of the party involves linking these fragmentary autonomous elements and socializing them into a new culture of struggle. This means that the party must emphasize and develop those forms of struggle which show workers the possibility of relying on their own collective solidarity and strength, not on capitalist legality and bureaucratic procedures; it must emphasize those programs which lay the basis for the unification of the working class. Particularly important in this regard are concrete challenges to the institution and ideology of white supremacy.

Our perspective aims at the development of an anti-capitalist dual power as the engine for the transformation of the mass reform struggle into a mass revolutionary movement. This dual power constitutes a revolutionary social bloc that exists within the framework of capitalism without ever acquiescing in the legitimacy or the permanence of the social order. The development of such a revolutionary social bloc determines our conception of the nature and role of

the party, and provides a set of priorities for practical work which are quite different from those of the perspectives which we have been criticizing.

THREE ASPECTS OF THE REFORM STRUGGLE

To make our approach more concrete, consider what it would imply for the activity of the party in a typical struggle situation — a normal strike, for example.

A normal strike is a reform struggle and all reform struggles share three related features. The first two are straightforward; there are a set of demands, more or less clearly expressed, which, except in syndicalist dreams, are demands for reforms; and there are certain patterns and forms of struggle — tactics. Strike tactics in this country are typically, but certainly not always, confined within the increasingly narrow bounds of capitalist labor law.

These two features of the reform struggle usually lead to some polarization — labor against management, picketer against scab, etc. This polarization seldom reaches the point of a clear and categorical division into two opposed camps along class lines. Instead, it tends to be held within the framework for mediating between conflicting 'interests' within capitalist society.

However, there is more to a struggle than demands and tactics. The typical strike involves a group of workers who manifest to some degree both the problems and the possibilities of the whole class. The group will embody or reflect the partial interests and the divisions within the class. Perhaps this will involve both a relatively privileged status for older, white, male workers, and resentment and reaction against these privileges; and both racist ideology and a reaction against it. Beyond this, the workers involved in the struggle will have a certain range of ideas about its meaning and importance; about the social group (class) of which they are a part (or believe themselves to be a part); and about what is generally right, good, and proper. Clearly, these, and the other aspects which make up the ideas and attitudes of the group of workers will be filled with internal contradiction and confusion. Not only will there be differences between various individuals and subgroups, it is likely that specific individuals will think and act in contradictory fashion.

Even though the specific group of workers will seldom be a completely representative cross-section of the entire class, every group will reflect the major elements of the collective consciousness of the class. As we have said, this collective consciousness is not a coherent and systematic ideology, and its reflection within each specific group of workers is also fragmentary, confused, and contradictory; a mixture of good sense, error, prejudice, and 'borrowed' features of capitalist ideology.

Although the term does not accurately convey just what we have in mind, we will call this third feature of every reform struggle its 'ideology'.

Some general observations can be made about a typical strike struggle in the framework of these three elements. First, once the ritual posturing of the union leadership is ended by the beginning of the strike, the demands generally turn out to be far less than what the workers need to make any real change in their situations — short of anything like what Ernest Mandel called 'basic trade union demands'. Second, the main feature of the strike tactics of the union leadership are reliance on cooperation with management and the state to discourage or control mass participation and any attempts to generalize the struggle beyond the specific plant or industry.

Opportunity for mass participation tends to be limited to picket duty and to contract ratification and strike votes. However, at least in basic industry, even these possibilities are disappearing. The usual picket line is a token gesture. The union and the company have already cooperated in the 'orderly' closure of the plant, and scabbing is the exception, not the rule. The most that picketing accomplishes is rather dubious public relations for the strike. The union membership votes, at best, have always been an indirect and passive form of mass involvement, and they are becoming even less important as more ways are developed to prevent the workers from gaining knowledge of the actual alternatives open to them, or from realizing their real strength, vis-à-vis the company and vis-à-vis the union leadership.

Real struggle over demands and tactics are kept inside the inner-leadership caucuses in the union, and confrontation with management is limited to the top union-management bargaining meetings. The mass of the workers have no way to participate in or even to directly influence, these aspects of the strike. For them the entire process grows more institutionalized and alienated, more a matter of formal than substantive struggle.

It is clear that such a situation works against the normal strike becoming an arena in which the participants can gain a sense of their independent power and revolutionary potential — an arena where workers can begin to slough off the backward and eclectic aspects of the existing mass consciousness and create a culture in line with actual class interests. In part this is made difficult because the present union leadership would combine with management to actively oppose it. But the more important obstacle is the entire institution of collective bargaining of which the normal strike is just a part. Collective bargaining is an inherently hostile terrain for the development of autonomous working class consciousness and organization, since its essence is the legal acceptance by the workers of the sanctity of the capitalist's ownership of his capital. By tying themselves to a 'better contract' as the goal of the struggle, the workers bind themselves to

capitalism.

For these reasons, the typical strike, whether or not it is successful in winning its stated goals, tends to support the feelings of workers that they are essentially powerless, that genuine collective action is not possible, that any organization is bound to screw its individual members, and, generally, that it is futile to try to actively influence any of the major forces determining one's life.

These are the characteristics of a 'normal' strike, a strike with unashamed and open reformists in leadership. (It isn't uncommon for the union leadership to be so corrupt and so committed to collaboration with the management that it scarcely deserves to be called reformist.) It is true that at times the workers break out of this framework spontaneously and engage in actions that have much more potential than 'normal' strikes, wildcats, etc. But such actions are generally short-lived, and, in themselves, don't provide an alternative to typical trade unionism, which puts clear limits on the possibilities for building mass revolutionary consciousness and organization.

The question which remains is this, how should the revolutionary party intervene in the entire range of working class struggles from 'normal' strikes to extraordinary mass insurgencies — in order to develop a mass revolutionary working class movement? In the answer to this question, the practical distinctions between various Marxist strategic perspectives become both more obvious and more crucial.

'UPPING THE ANTE'

Many of the positions which we criticized earlier would hold that the major emphasis in the party's work should be to win the workers to 'better' demands than those advanced by the reformists. Much of the debate on the left over the past decade has been centered on just exactly what it meant to talk about 'better' demands, and, as a consequence, there has been a surplus of arguments about which demands were 'revolutionary' and which 'counter-revolutionary', or 'reformist', or 'economist' — over whether or not 'qualitative' demands were good while 'quantitative' demands were bad, etc.

The common assumption at the core of this debate was that certain demands, short of the demand for state power, had an inherently revolutionary content. This assumption is made explicit in the notion of transitional demands advanced by various Trotskyist groups. Supposedly, if mass struggles could be developed around such magic demands, the laborious process of convincing the participants in the struggle, and, ultimately, the entire working class, of the necessity and possibility of socialism could be by-passed.

An example of the problems with this approach is provided by the experiences of the C.P. in the CIO at the beginning of the Cold War. The C.P. spent much time and energy maneuvering various labor

groups into opposition to the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine, and into support for the Progressive Party. Its mistake was to concentrate on changing the formal stance of organizations, often through 'clever' tricks such as passing resolutions late in meetings after the opposition had gone home, rather than to ensure that the resolutions actually reflected a corresponding change in the content of the workers' consciousness. As a consequence, the main result of all of this work was that the anti-communists in the labor movement were given a wealth of persuasive examples of the manipulative and conspiratorial character of the C.P.

The lesson is simple. Either a base of popular understanding for a certain demand exists, or it does not exist. When the party sees its role as winning a formal acceptance of 'better' demands, without developing any program to actually convince the particular constituency of the significance of these demands, most of its biggest 'successes' will be turned into weapons against it. This is most clearly the case in attempts to introduce demands that involve a revolution, without developing a mass understanding of the possibility and necessity of a revolution.

This doesn't mean that the demands 'make no difference'. Of course, the party should agitate for demands which reflect the real needs of the struggle, and should expose demands which are sops or which rest on illusions, or which would lead away from class unity. Perhaps, in some situations it may be a valuable technique to focus agitation and propaganda around a set of alternative demands to those being pushed by the reformists. The problems arise when the question of which demands becomes more than a technical and tactical question and is allowed to assume a strategic significance in itself. This always subordinates the real problems and possibilities involved in organizing the workers as a revolutionary class, to a search for gimmicks and shortcuts.

In short, 'upping the ante' on the demands of a normal strike situation — or any reform struggle — is only one, relatively unimportant, aspect of the intervention of the party in the struggle. At best, it is not sufficient, and, at worst, it is counter-productive.

This same notion of 'upping the ante' is also commonly applied to tactics, particularly in terms of their militance. The limitations and pitfalls in this area parallel those just discussed in terms of demands. When the party attempts to stage manage a struggle into a confrontation with the police or some other part of the state's coercive apparatus, the result is often disastrous. Without genuine popular participation in the option for militance, police repression appears to have been provoked, resulting in an unnecessary narrowing of the base of the struggle, and a broadening of the possibility of the legitimate suppression of its leadership, rather than in any transformation of the consciousness of the participants in the struggle.

The issue of militance dominates left debates about tactics, but white tactical militance is important, it can't create the cultural-ideological polarization which is fundamental to the organization of the workers as a class. Other tactical considerations are at least as important as militance in this regard. One of these is participation. The party must develop tactics which maximize the opportunity for mass participation in struggle, not passive participation; as an audience, or bodies at a demonstration, or a voting bloc — the things stressed the C.P. and the S.W.P., in their 'mobilizations' — but participation which gives workers the experience of wielding power and shouldering political responsibility. Often Marxists regard these sorts of tactical considerations as sentimental utopianism, and it is true that they are often raised in a utopian or an anarchistic manner. Nevertheless, it is a basic mistake for the party to subordinate the development of active mass participation in the struggle to what is felt to be 'good organization' or 'efficiency'.

Nothing has been particularly distinctive in the ways which we propose to relate to the demands and tactics of the mass movement. Certainly, we still haven't dealt with why, and how, it is possible to build a 'revolutionary social bloc' out of the ingredients provided by the mass struggle. Clearly, it is the third aspect of the reform struggle, the aspect which we have called the 'ideological', which is vital. This is where the party's work is most crucial and must be concentrated, and this is also the area in which Marxists have been most prone to rely on slogans and clichés: 'winning the workers to communism', 'developing class consciousness', 'struggling against capitalist ideology' - sets of words and phrases which can justify doing almost anything, or almost nothing.

TWO CONCEPTIONS OF THE WORLD

Suppose that we asked the question, what determines the way that working people think and act? Obviously an adequate answer would be complicated. We would have to include such diverse factors as custom and tradition, experience, what is 'learned' in schools or heard on the TV, what people in the same general circles generally think and do, common sense, what it takes to 'get by'. Suppose we asked further, what underlies all of these factors which determine the way that working people think and act? Ultimately, if we push far enough, we will get to two basic factors which combine and interact to produce the specific ideology which motivates workers at any given time.

One major factor determining the content or working class ideology is the capitalist conception of the world which is imprinted on their consciousness. Working people are led to certain patterns of thought and action because they and their parents before them live in a capital-

ist society. The "ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas." Capitalist ideology and capitalist culture is in the air. To 'succeed', or to just get by workers normally must behave according to capitalist standards of rationality and practicability.

The rule of capital isn't exercised only, or even mainly through the use of overt economic, political, and military power by the capitalist class. It is manifested as well in the capitalist domination of the institutions and organizations which socialize individuals and groups and relate them to each other; not only the factory and the government, but also the schools, the churches, the mass media, the family, the political, fraternal, labor, nationality, social, and recreational organization. Through these forms, essential capitalist notions of what is right good and proper are transformed into material forces on the lives of working people.

The second factor determining the content of working class ideology is the potential of that class to become a ruling class. This potential is manifested in, and demonstrated by, ideas and actions which run counter to the capitalist conception of the world. As has been said, these ideas and actions become mass phenomena during periods of sharp struggle...often being articulated as the explicit basis of the struggle.

Since the ideology of the workers is the result of the interaction of these two hostile conceptions of the world, it is not surprising that it is not reasoned and coherent, but fragmentary and internally contradictory. Mixed in with the most primitive and backward prejudices are features which foreshadow the potential of the workers to collectively construct an entirely different social order. In fact, it's not uncommon to find ideas flowing from these hostile class outlooks expressed by a worker in the same sentence. How many times have we heard workers say that, 'communism is a good idea but it wouldn't work because people are basically selfish (or lazy, or dumb, etc.)'. In the capitalist conception of the world, there is no sense in which 'communism' is a good idea, while the notion that man is inherently selfish is a pillar of capitalist common sense.

There is always a struggle between these two conceptions of the world in the mind of the worker. However, under normal conditions the capitalist world view is much more potent. Its advocates are best organized. It is supported by the ruling class's ability to give rewards to 'right-thinkers' and provide sanctions against 'heretics'.

On the other hand, in conditions which are not normal, conditions of heightened class struggle, the lack of coherence and consistency in the imprinted capitalist conception of the world, its inability to explain the total social reality in which the worker exists, along with the presence of essentially contradictory elements within the worker's consciousness, come to the fore as political facts.

The break with the routine of working class life which takes

place during mass struggles, provides a social framework in which workers begin to take their own politics, or lack of politics, seriously. More and more they become aware that how they think and act makes a difference, not just to their families and themselves, but to the society generally. Then it becomes possible for the party to show how what is in the worker's head is a source of power — insofar as it reflects the world view of the working class — and a source of weakness — insofar as it reflects the world view of the capitalist class. As the struggle grows more intense, the conflict between alternative conceptions of the world becomes sharper. Here is how the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, describes the process and its implications:

> "...does it not often happen that there is a contradiction between the intellectual fact and the norm of conduct? What then will the real conception of the world be: the one which is logically affirmed as an intellectual fact, or the one which is implicit in his actions? And since actions are always political actions, can we not say that the real philosophy of anyone is contained in his politics? This conflict between thought and action, that is, the coexistence of two conceptions of the world, one affirmed in words and the other explaining itself in effective actions, is not always due to bad faith. Bad faith can be a satisfactory explanation for some individuals taken singly, or even for more or less numerous groups, _ but it is not satisfactory when the contrast shows itself in the life of large masses; then it cannot be other than the expression of more profound contradictions of an historical and social order. It means that a social group, which has its own conception of the world, even though embryonic (which shows itself in actions, and so only spasmodically, occasionally, that is, when such a group moves as an organic unity) has, as a result of intellectual subordination and submission, borrowed a conception it also believes it is following, because it does follow it in 'normal' times, when its conduct is not independent and autonomous, but precisely subordinate and submissive." (Gramsci, THE MODERN PRINCE, page 61.)

The first manifestation of this conflict between worldviews is when workers begin to act in ways which they would normally think were crazy. An experience of an unemployed organizer in a small town in central Missouri in the early 1930's provides a good example.

The organizer for the Unemployed Councils came into the town, which had lots of unemployment, but no homegrown radicals or mass organization, and set up a meeting. Despite harassment by the local officials, the meeting was successful and transformed itself o a large demonstration outside of the jail where a man had been imprisoned for not paying his debts. At first, the Mayor and the Chief of Police refused to meet with a delegation from the demonstration, but the situation quickly got too tense for the Mayor. He met the delegation, treated it to a long lecture on the particular worthlessness of the prisoner, but, finally, was forced to agree to release the man.

With the prisoner released, the Mayor saw an opportunity to

make some political capital. Taking the prisoner to the front of the crowd of demonstrators, he took credit for everything and offered to buy the man and his family the 'best meal they'd ever had.' They went across the street together to the town's fancy restaurant with a big section of the demonstration following behind.

The Mayor ordered a big meal. The ex-prisoner and his wife, neither of whom had been at all active politically, ordered a glass of water, and, despite the Mayor's pleas, they refused anything more. It was a very simple action, but one that transformed the situation. Because of it, the Mayor's token gesture, which might have disorganized the struggle, played the opposite role. For our argument the important fact is that this is the kind of action which the couple would nave never taken in a 'normal' situation. In fact, in 'normal' times, it would have seemed absolutely crazy to take such a symbolic stand, bound to enrage the town powers and to result in no tangible benefits.

DUAL POWER

The two essential parts of our approach to the transformation of groups of exploited and oppressed workers into a revolutionary social bloc have now been clarified. The characteristics of the social bloc already exist in the attitudes, ideas, and experiences which are a part of the consciousness of the class. They will not have to be developed from scratch, or lectured into the workers. These autonomous characteristics are generally incorporated within, and subordinated to, the features of working class consciousness which are imprinted on the workers by the dominant ideology and culture, but the development of mass struggle tends to bring them out as competing political tendencies.

Second, the separation between conflicting worldviews is not a clear one, and, perhaps more important, it is temporary, present only 'spasmodically' and sporadically, in the heat of the struggle. As struggles subside, the characteristics which foreshadow the possibility of socialism are generally submerged, or turned into harmless formalities, as, for example, the preservation of the 'brother' and 'sister' form of address inside the trade unions where the actual relationships are anything but fraternal.

The basic strategic function of the party, then, is to take hold of each of these features of the struggle, clarify its revolutionary implications and the categorical nature of the break with old patterns of thinking and acting which it represents, and incorporate it into a more systematic challenge to capitalism. This is not primarily a job of agitation and propaganda, although clearly they are a part of what must be done.

The party has two main tasks: First, it must develop programs of activity and forms of mass organization which incorporate these fea-

tures of working class consciousness as unifying and activating principles — as the basis for continuing the struggle. Second, the party must link these fragmentary elements together into a revolutionary dual power. In this fashion the party can begin to teach the working class that socialism is within its power.

To clarify our point, let us use a major struggle, the great Flint Sit-Down strike, as an example. On one level that strike was a reform struggle aimed at improving the wages and conditions of GM workers, and forcing the company to recognize the UAW as the representative of the workers. Most of the participants in the strike certainly did not see themselves as revolutionaries. Their goals were reforms — basic improvements in their immediate conditions.

But on another level, the Flint strike was a revolutionary struggle. The workers took possession of the means of production, not, it is true, to operate them for the common good, but as a lever to gain some power over the work process. The occupation of the plant was a challenge to the institution of private property. It was 'illegal' going far beyond the permissible bounds and limits of labor organizing at a time when even picketing was of dubious legality. Beyond this, the self-organization of the striking workers, particularly their refusal to accept any external authority, even that of the local UAW leadership, foreshadowed the possibility of workers' self-government.

From our point of view, these revolutionary aspects of the Flint strike defined the major tasks of the party. They are what should have been built upon. Agitationally, the party should have emphasized that the strike was a violation of the sanctity of private property — that it showed that a united working class could force concessions from the capitalist, regardless of the laws, courts, and the rights of ownership. The mass participation and self-organization around broad class issues should have been developed and pointed in the direction of the formation of workers' councils, even if the viability of such formations in the long run was not highly probable.

However, the strike leadership, much of which was communist, took the opposite course. It emphasized the importance of obtaining the reform demands, and this inevitably played into the hands of the overtly reformist sections of the CIO who wanted to pass off the sit-down as merely a dramatic tactic to achieve the recognition of the union. In fact, G.M. and the capitalist press in Flint and around the country did much more than the communists to point out the strike's revolutionary implications and characteristics.

With no communist leadership trying to socialize the revolutionary lessons of the struggle, the potential it developed was quickly lost. The remnants of the mass participation and self-organization built during the strike were gradually channeled into typical inner-union parliamentarianism and other such games.

This didn't happen just because of the strength and resilience of

capitalism, but also as a consequence of the choices, mistakes, decisions, etc. of the workers, union organizers, and, particularly, of the communists who were involved in the Flint strike. No clear distinction was developed between a reformist and a revolutionary approach to the struggle, although this could clearly have been done. Whether or not the revolutionary perspective would have triumphed is another issue. However, to quote Marx:

> "World history would indeed be very easy to make, if the struggle were taken up only on conditions of infallibly favorable chances." (Letter to Kugelmann, April 17, 1871.)

THE PARTY

The revolutionary dual power is a constellation of individuals, organizations, and institutions developing from those features of the struggle against capital which manifest the potential of the working class to be a ruling class. The revolutionary party is the core of this social bloc, its primary source of cohesion. The responsibility of the party is to maintain the maximum pressure against the structure of capital that is consistent with the actual base of support which the bloc has been able to generate. The party combines a clear and critical estimate of social forces and processes with programs to clarify to the workers the ways in which their own actions, ideas, and relationships prefigure socialism. In this way the urgency of the revolution, can be transformed from an intellectual conclusion to a matter of felt need, and the workability of socialism can be changed from a matter of endless abstract debate to a fact of experience.

Up to this point the main focus of this paper has been the content of the party's strategic role. But now that-we have spelled this out as clearly as we can, another question must be considered. What sort of a party organization is needed to fulfill such a role — how will it be structured, how will it be related to the working class, how will it link theory and practice?

DISCIPLINE AND CENTRALISM

The party cannot work, and, indeed, will have problems merely surviving, as a loose federation of individual revolutionaries. If nothing were considered beyond the need for self-preservation, the party would have to be a disciplined and centralized organization. However, this does not mean that the party should be modeled after a well-trained army — not even a revolutionary people's army. In the party, discipline and centralism must be based on a conscious and critical rank and file membership. To the extent that a cult of obedience is substituted for such a membership, discipline and centralism will not work properly.

Beyond their disciplined and centralized character, party organizations must be collective organisms, with a pattern of internal relationships allowing non-competitive, but critical, consideration of complicated and sticky aspects of work, without sacrificing the quality of the individual participation. Only under such conditions can party decisions represent the best thought of the entire membership, and only then will there be any assurance that decisions, once made, will be conscientiously implemented and critically reviewed. It should go without saying that these relationships must exist, not only at every organizational level of the party, but between the higher and the lower levels of the party as well.

Most treatments of the vanguard party, even that of Stalin, generally accept this conception of the necessity of both discipline and centralism and collectivity and criticism from below.

> "This does not mean, of course, that the possibility of contests of opinion within the party are thereby precluded. On the contrary, iron discipline does not preclude, but presupposes criticism and contest of opinion within the party. Least of all does it mean that discipline must be 'blind'. On the contrary, iron discipline does not preclude, but presupposes conscious and voluntary submission, for only conscious discipline can be iron discipline." (Stalin, FOUNDATIONS OF LENINISM, page 120.)

Why is it then that most Leninist party organizations, and particularly those communist parties which model themselves after the CPSU, are rightly notorious both for their bureaucratic leadership and their a-critical membership?

There is really no mystery. While it is generally agreed that a critical membership and a genuinely collective organization are desirable goals, they are not seen as absolute necessities. Often it seems more efficient to have the party membership carry out the line, without regard to whether or not they understand and accept it — not to mention whether or not they have had anything to do with developing it. As the argument goes, if the 'right' thing is done, it is a minor matter if those who did it were convinced that what they were doing was right. At the root of this practice is the same mechanical notion of efficiency that leads many Marxists to ignore the real problems involved in transforming the ideology and culture of the workers in the rush to 'get things done'; only now it is applied to what is supposedly the 'conscious' section of the class, the party.

In the course of this section on the party, it will become clear why we think that this sort of 'efficiency' is actually the most criminal sort of inefficiency. Now, we will make just two points:

First, the masses of people in this country will want to see a little socialism in practice, before they abandon all of the stereotypes and caricatures of socialism which are a part of capitalist propaganda. People will have a justifiable skepticism about revolutionaries whose organizational lifestyle fails to foreshadow the sort of a society that

they are projecting as the alternative to capitalism. Just as devout Christians, members of revolutionary groups are constantly judged according to how well they practice what they preach.

There is a second and more compelling reason why the party must function collectively, and why each of its members must function critically.

The party must test out its theories and policies. The validity of the 'line' is not some inherent characteristic of it; it is an attribute that must be demonstrated in practice. And the point at which the political program of the party makes contact with the mass movement has to be the point where its critical evaluation begins and where its validity is demonstrated. This point of contact is the rank and file membership. A line which isn't properly understood by the membership, cannot be adequately criticized by it — if it is criticized at all — and thus an a-critical membership hamstrings the entire testing process by which the truth of the program is determined.

PARTY AND CLASS

Calling the party the 'vanguard' of the working class has led to a great deal of debate about the relationship between the party and the class. Clearly the term vanguard is not meant to be just a description of the relationship of the party to the mass struggle. That would mean that we couldn't have regarded the Bolsheviks as the vanguard party in Russia until a few weeks before the November Revolution. But neither does the term mean, as many anti-Leninists claim, that a Vanguard party is inherently opposed to the self-organization of the working class — that it is an attempt by a small group of intellectuals to substitute their own policies and programs for the historical role of the entire class.

It is true that the history of Leninist organizations, particularly the CPSU supports this criticism. In many cases parties have counter-posed their own organization and program to the development of the creativity and initiative of the masses of workers. The role of the French C.P. in the May, 1968, General Strike is an important recent example of this. However, in our view it is not inevitable that a Leninist organization fall into this pattern of work, and, in fact, if this does happen, it is fatal for any revolutionary strategy.

> It would be disastrous if a sectarian conception of the Party role in the revolution...(fixed) in forms of immediate power an apparatus governing the masses in movement, forcing the revolutionary process into the forms of the Party. The result would be to divert a number of men and to 'dominate' history, but the real revolutionary process would escape the control and influence of the Party which would unconsciously become an organ of conservatism. (Gramsci, SOVIETS IN ITALY, page 23.)

When we describe the party as the vanguard of the working class

what we mean is that the party is the section of the working class, mat understands 'the revolutionary potential of the, class, and that has developed a historical project to realize that class potential. For an organization with such a conception of its role to work against any mass development towards organic workers' democracy is always self-defeating.

A different problem concerning the relationship of the party to the working class is the tendency of many Marxists towards a cult of the worker, based on a mechanical conception of the relationship of class position to political and social consciousness. It is true that most of the membership of the party will be workers; after all, the vast majority of the people in this country are workers. But worker recruits do not automatically or 'instinctively' become revolutionary communists. They become such to the extent that they are able to, critically transcend the 'working class ideology' which develops spontaneously under capitalism.

The responsibility of all of the members of the party to aim to function as the core of the 'organic intellectuals' of the working class is more important than the question of the class origins of the members. Unless this is seen as an important goal, the party will not be able to effectively articulate an alternative to capitalist culture.

Groups like the C.P. and P.L. have a different conception of the relationship between the party and the class. Their tendency is to find 'working class culture' in some distillation of the current attitudes of the workers - generally in pragmatic and a-critical materialism, and the narrow moral and aesthetic norms which are the distorted reflection within the working class of the dominant culture. The most pernicious form of this tendency is left anti-intellectualism and particularly the use of charges of 'anti-working class' and 'petty bourgeois' as a weapon against criticism. There are ideas and approaches which are working class and (or) petty bourgeois, but these positions must be demonstrated to be mistaken independently of any attack on the motives, class background, etc. of those who advance them. After all, an important aspect of the vanguard role is the defeat, on their own grounds and at their strongest points, of the most imposing of capitalist intellectual systems.

In pointing out both the unity and the distinctiveness of the party with the class, we have described some of the formal aspects of the relationship between the two. However, the most important issue is the functional content of the relationship which allows the party to fulfill the strategic responsibilities which we have described earlier.

> On the other hand, organism of thought and cultural solidarity (can) only (be) brought about if there (exists) between the intellectuals and the simple people that unity which there should be between theory and practice: if, that is, the intellectuals (are) organically the intellectuals of those masses, if they (elaborate) and (make) coherent the principles and prob-

> lems which those masses pose by their practical activity, in this way constitute a cultural and social bloc. (Gramsci, THE MODERN PRINCE, page 26. In this selection 'intellectuals' refers to the party.)
>
> (The goal is)...to raise the intellectual level of ever-widening strata of the people, giving personality to the amorphous elements of the masses, which means working to produce cadres of intellectuals of a new type who arise directly from the masses though remaining in contact with them. Gramsci, THE MODERN PRINCE, page 73)

The party discovers the problems which it must solve in the actual conditions of working class life. Then, it transforms these conditions through the implementation of programs aimed at achieving political and class consciousness and a culture in harmony with the real interests and potentials of the working class. In this process, the party recreates and broadens its political base and its membership.

MARXISM AND SCIENCE

It is common to hear the claim that Marxism is a 'science of society', which contains 'laws' of social development similar to physical laws. Thus, the growth of capitalism and its subsequent decline and decay are seen as internal necessities inherent in capitalist property relations and (largely) independent of human action and human will. From this point of view, the party's adherence to Marxism endows it with an understanding of the 'laws of social development,' and thus with the keys to the truth about capitalism. With such positions all around, it is not surprising that, despite Engels' warning, many Marxists do act as if they had 'history in their pockets' as the answer to a 'simple equation of the first degree.'

This conception of Marxism - and it is widespread - also undermines the development of the critical capacity of a Marxist party and supports what we identify as the Stalin model of party organization. Obviously, if Marxism is able to foresee the future, it is not crucial for the rank and file party member to understand why and how the trained Marxists in the party leadership arrived at a certain decision. After all, it is possible to drive a car without understanding Newtonian physics.

Opponents of Marxism get a lot of mileage out of the incongruity of a movement whose basic premise is to 'change the world' adopting a deterministic stance. If the shape of the future is already determined, why do Marxists constantly exhort their followers and potential followers to struggle harder - or differently? And when the position is taken one step further, doesn't it entail the conclusion that the working class will be compelled by the laws of history to make a successful revolution, removing any necessity for a vanguard party?

How can we deal with these issues? In the first place, it is true that there is a basic structure of society which develops according to understandable and predictable patterns. By analyzing this structure,

Marx was able to predict, for example, that the development of capitalism entailed the development of monopoly capitalism. Further clarification of this structure, and its operative contradictions, can be scientific in the same sense that the natural sciences are scientific, although the variables are much more complex and the danger of the becoming an influence on what he is investigating - or vice versa much greater.

However, although this is certainly no small accomplishment, most that such an analysis can do is to clarify which concrete historical changes can, and which cannot, occur. Except in the most general way, it is not able to make clear what will, and what will not happen. What can be predicted, more or less accurately, are the circumstances in which the class struggle will be waged, and the potentials of the contending class forces and ideologies.

Clarity on this point is vital. Either there are 'laws' which determine the way the historical process must develop, or, while there may be objective limits on it, history is concretely determined by the content and direction of human action.

(It is necessary to clarify here that the determinist conceptions of Marxism do not rule out the importance of human action totally, at least, not except for the most ludicrous versions.) The usual argument is that in the historical process class interests are expressed through human actions. As a consequence of the clash and interaction of countless individual actions which all ultimately reduce to embodiments of different class interests, history is determined 'behind the backs' of the human actors, irrespective of the desires, intentions, and motives which underlie the actions. Our concern is not with this sort of human action, but with the causal role played by conscious and deliberate political policies, and, in particular with the significance on the one hand of the concerted efforts of the capitalist class to maintain its power knowing something of the nature and plans of its antagonists and with the concerted efforts of the working class and its vanguard to make a socialist revolution.

If the former position is accurate, then with a proper analysis of society, the party can foresee the future, but in the process, the denial of any genuine determining role for human action has removed the rational for its own existence. One wise man could fulfill what remains of its role as well as an organization. However, if the second position is adopted, the party's possession of the 'truth' and its ability to operate 'scientifically' must be demonstrated through the implementation of a revolutionary program.

In our view, the second position is correct. "Changing the world" depends on the creation of a political movement which can play a positive determining role in historical development. More specifically, in an advanced capitalist society, it depends on the ability of the party to

guide the development of an autonomous revolutionary "class for itself" out of the historically determined possibilities of the working class. "All" that the party must do is to develop the working class consciousness, organization, and will to gain and hold power and to construct a new civilization. The shape of the future depends on this historical project. It is rash to regard its successful outcome as somehow pre-ordained, but this is just what those Marxists who claim that socialism is inevitable tend inevitably, to do.

There is a sense in which the party, if it is working properly, can be called scientific. Depending on the point of reference, this may be seen either as a downgrading or an upgrading of the importance of the party. The party's scientific character is uniquely embodied in its method of operation, in the way that it proves out its theories and line, not in some- inherent truth in them. It is manifested in the way that the party sets its political goals, develops a program to achieve these goals, and then reviews and criticizes the entire process in the framework of a larger strategy.

The party's organic collective nature, described earlier in this section, is the basis for its scientific operation. The party is able to set itself a project and act in the role of a "collective historical experimenter". The experimental scientist, of course, has the advantage of a more or less controlled arena in which to work, while the whole of capitalist society is the laboratory for the party, and its ability to isolate variables is extremely limited. However, this only makes it more difficult for the party to function scientifically, it doesn't make it impossible.

To develop the parallel with the experimental scientist further, the party's closeness to the routine of exploitation, oppression, and alienation, as it is experienced in the daily life of the working people, makes it impossible for it to raise the right questions for investigation. Its choice of programs of struggle parallels the choice of a working hypothesis for the experimental scientist. The "cadre of intellectuals of a new type who arise directly from the masses though remaining in contact with them", provide the vital bond linking the articulation of the program to its implementation and evaluation. Without this bond, there would be no social basis for testing either the relevance or the validity of the program.

This all sounds very neat, but we must deal with reality which is a little messy. There are few communist organizations which function in anything approaching this manner, while there are an almost infinite number of examples of doctrinaire, bureaucratic, and incompetent communist organizations…not to mention those which are sell-outs. To understand why this is the case, consider the parallel with the experimental scientist still further. Clearly, within the framework of the discipline, the scientist must constantly criticize procedures and equipment, and, if only for purposes of self-clarification, basic assumptions

and premises. Does this possibility exist for the party, and, if so, how is it organized and expressed?

This question raises a number of issues. We have explained earlier that a party must demand full implementation of its decisions, not because it is inconceivable that a decision could be mistaken, but because an adequate evaluation is impossible if a decision is not carried out. Policies which are implemented in a halfhearted manner cannot be fully criticized because there is no sound basis for judging the relative importance of the failures in execution and the mistakes in the policy itself. This sort of problem comes up frequently in degenerated party organizations like the CPUSA, where most policies are not really intended to be seriously implemented and thus can never be properly criticized.

In any case, disciplined implementation of decisions is a condition for the proper operation of the party. However, it is just as essential that the party, and this means its individual members, be constantly critical. Criticism cannot be limited to policies and programs, but must also be extended to the party's basic strategic premises and goals (presuming that such criticism stays within the framework of the struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism by the working class). If such basic criticism is barred, crucial new insights, such as, for example, Lenin's conception of the possibility of the seizure of state power at capitalism's weakest link rather than at its point of highest development, will develop only in spite of, not through, the party.

Meaningful criticism must deal with real alternatives. For example, no criticism of a trade union policy of building caucuses within the existing trade union structure will have real substance, if it doesn't consider the possibilities of working outside of that structure. This stress on criticism, then, can only mean that different and conflicting possibilities and options to every accepted policy and program must constantly be raised. The resurrection of options and alternatives to the course actually being pursued cannot help but to undermine the single-mindedness of the implementation of decisions.

A CONTRADICTION

Here is a very real dilemma. Decisions must be carried out with "iron discipline", but at the same time, every aspect of the work of the party must be under constant criticism. This is where the Stalin model of the party with its entire military-administrative superstructure breaks down. In that conception of the party, and it is the common conception, not the exception, the reality of this contradiction is theoretically ignored, while, in practice, every instance of conflict between "iron discipline" and a critical approach to policy is automat-

ically resolved in favor of discipline. In this way criticism comes to be regarded as heresy, and democratic centralism turns into a cult of obedience. The outstanding characteristic of the membership of the party becomes its passive acceptance of, and faith in, whatever line the majority of the leadership happens to be pushing at the given moment.

Most current conceptions of the party, in this country at least, seem inclined to accept, and even to glorify, the Stalinist notions of how the party should be structured and how it should work. Hopefully, this is a passing phase…a part of the current fascination with military approaches to political problems.

Let's consider this problem more concretely. Subject to the normal organized review, the party must demand the disciplined implementation of a trade union or an electoral policy. This demand must extend to all members, including those whose disagreements with the policy are based on differences with the estimates and theoretical conceptions which underlie it. At the same time, debate and discussion must always be open on the more basic questions. This holds even more strongly on those issues of overriding importance…the nature of contemporary capitalism, the relationship between the national and the class question, the relationship between reform and revolution. Such topics must always be on the agenda for the party or its internal life will dry up and it will be unable to function properly. Will this freedom of discussion create a danger that the implementation of agreed-upon decisions will be undermined? Of course it will. But the dangers involved in failing to allow, and even to promote, this kind of discussion are much more ominous for a revolutionary party.

There is no pat resolution of this contradiction, but recognition of its reality is a major step in the right direction. In the party, discipline will have to be based on a common understanding of the reasons for its necessity. This means that the entire membership of the party must have a basic understanding of how the party must operate, if it is to be a functioning collective organism. Administratively imposed obedience is not only not a substitute for this understanding, it is its negation. Unless the party helps its own members think and act critically and creatively, it cannot possible function as the conscious component of the working class.

CONCLUSION

These are some of our ideas about the strategic approach and organizational form of the revolutionary party. We haven't covered all of the points which we would like, and regard our positions on many of those which we have considered as tentative. Nevertheless, we offer the paper as a basis for discussion and criticism.

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