

81-7, 348

50¢

REVOLUTION

and

DEMOCRACY

Harry Boyte

Frank Ackerman

Reprinted by:
NEW AMERICAN MOVEMENT

The New American Movement (NAM) exists to help organize a movement for democratic socialism in the United States. Our aim is to establish working-class control of the enormous productive capacity of American industry, to create a society that will provide material comfort and security for all people, and in which the full and free development of every individual will be the basic goal. Such a society will strive for decentralization of decision making, an end to bureaucratic rule, and participation of all people in shaping their own lives and the direction of society. We believe the elimination of sexist and racist institutions and the dismantling of American economic and social control abroad are central to the struggle for socialism.

For more information on NAM, please write:

NATIONAL OFFICE:

1643 N. Milwaukee Ave.
Chicago, IL 60647
312-252-7151

NEWSPAPER:

6025 Shattuck Ave.
Oakland, CA 94609
415-852-1756

We would like to express our thanks for permission to reprint "Revolution and Democracy" from Socialist Revolution, Agenda Publishing Company, 396 Sanchez St., San Francisco, CA, 94114.

The views presented in this pamphlet do not necessarily reflect the views of the organization as a whole. For further discussion on issues raised in this pamphlet see Discussion Bulletin #6 which can be obtained from the National Office at a cost of \$1.00 per copy. The POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE NEW AMERICAN MOVEMENT, adopted at the founding convention in Minneapolis, June, 1972, can also be purchased for 25¢.

REVOLUTION AND DEMOCRACY

*Harry Boyte
and Frank Ackerman*

WHAT FORM OF revolutionary organization is appropriate for revolution in an advanced capitalist country like the United States? Why does the left need a national organization at all? Which of Lenin's ideas are applicable to this country, and which are not? This paper is an attempt to answer these and related questions.

I. WHY A THEORY OF ORGANIZATION?

THE IDEA OF SOCIALISM is spreading much more rapidly than any socialist organization. Increasingly, involvement in radical social protest leads many to a belief in the goal of a socialist society. But the goal too often remains abstract, unrelated even to the specific-issue movements in which socialists are active. To make socialism more than a private belief of movement activists, to build a unified socialist movement, we need a theory of the organizational forms suited to the specific tasks of an American revolution.

Two theories of organization of the revolutionary process are widespread on the left today, "Leninism" and "localism." Both have considerable strengths, but both are ultimately inadequate for the tasks facing us. Leninists, awed by the obviously inspiring accomplishments of the Russian and Chinese revolutions, conclude that the form of party organization that led those revolutions is the appropriate one for the United States as well. The repeated failures of Leninist parties in this country are interpreted as results of the "wrong line" or "misleadership," not as evidence against that form of organization. Localists, on the other hand, hold that in view of the non-revolutionary character of most Americans today, what the left needs are thousands of local organizations forming around local grievances. At some point in the distant future these organizations will come to recognize the common origins of their grievances, and will merge into larger, more revolutionary organizations. The failure of this vision to date is attributed to the insufficient numbers of local organizers--"If there are too many radicals in Boston, try Oshkosh," as one localist recently put it.

We agree that thousands of local groups, responding to locally felt grievances, are indispensable to a revolutionary movement. And we agree with localism's implicit criticism of many past and present socialist groups: groups that call themselves socialist are all too often heavy-handed, dogmatic, insensitive to people's real needs and even their intelligence; we

think that such characteristics flow from an impoverished understanding of what the revolutionary process will mean in the United States, and what form of organization is necessary to help bring it about.

But we are also aware of the drawbacks of purely local activity: local groups do not grow in a steady crescendo towards larger and more revolutionary formations; often they "burn out," discouraged in part at their small size and isolation relative to the enemy they are facing, or unable to make the transition from one issue to another. Moreover, within capitalism most local grievances have their roots, and must ultimately find their solutions, at a national level, as part of the general struggle against the capitalist *system*; capitalism organizes all the institutions of the society on a national and even international scale, in accordance with its values and priorities. The resources, energy, and the potential power of a nationwide, socialist organization can be a vital asset to, rather than an ideological distraction from, local organizing.

Indeed, many apparently local organizations cannot exist solely on their local resources, and naturally have connections to a larger movement. But, as community organizing experience has often shown, in the absence of a national organization through which local groups can relate to each other and struggle for a common political understanding, contacts between groups easily become personal contacts of a few individuals, creating tension and suspicion of elitism within groups.

The localist strategy relies on a faith in the spontaneous spreading of local organizing, a faith that was a natural product of the movement's optimism and rapid expansion in the 1960s, but which becomes increasingly untenable in the "somber seventies." To move forward today, the localist faith must be replaced by a conscious strategy and a nationwide socialist organization. The localist resistance to larger organization, though it starts from a perfectly serious political position, and often a deep commitment to democracy, can lead to political individualism and egotism, to a failure ever to take the first steps toward the larger patterns of discussion, coordination, and planning that will be necessary to create socialism in the United States.

The strengths of what is called Leninism in the United States are in some ways opposite to those of localism. Leninism recognizes the need for socialist organization, which localism denies or postpones. Further, Leninism proposes a specific type of party and presents a developed theoretical rationale for that form. It has as well the example of the Russian, Chinese, Cuban, and Vietnamese revolutions to point to, though it has a rather less impressive record from fifty years of attempts to organize in advanced capitalist countries. All this must be considered and evaluated in detail, by all socialists.

It is all the more important to carry out a careful evaluation of Leninism because of the emotional confusion that surrounds the issue on the left, a confusion that has, if that is possible, increased in recent years. Frequently it is presented as an all-or-nothing choice: some adopt "Leninism" uncritically, seeing it as the only alternative to localism, and the only possible serious form of Marxism; others reject it equally uncritically, either out of residual anti-communism or in reaction to the arrogance and authoritarianism of particular "Leninist" parties. We find the question too important and too complex for a simple yes-or-no answer; we will attempt to identify the real issues raised by Lenin himself, and will state our positions on them, before presenting our objections to American Leninism

and outlining our model of organization.

The needs, the possibilities, and the appropriate forms of organization in our revolutionary movement must be based on the material conditions of our society, here and now—the United States in the 1970s. We admire, and draw inspiration from, many accomplishments of the Russian, Chinese, Cuban, and Vietnamese revolutions.¹ To the extent that there are important similarities in the situations, the experience of these revolutions will be useful. But to the extent that our situation has important differences from past pre-revolutionary situations, our revolutionary movement, as well, must be different.

For those who consider this approach too great a deviation from Leninist or Maoist orthodoxy, we urge them to take seriously the spirit of the Chinese Communists, and to adopt the method of Lenin. In Mao's words,

For the Chinese Communists who are part of the great Chinese nation, flesh of its flesh and blood of its blood, any talk about Marxism in isolation from China's characteristics is merely Marxism in the abstract, Marxism in a vacuum. Hence to apply Marxism concretely in China so that its every manifestation has an indubitably Chinese character, i.e., to apply Marxism in the light of China's specific characteristics, becomes a problem which it is urgent for the whole Party to understand and solve. Foreign stereotypes must be abolished, there must be less singing of empty abstract tunes, and dogmatism must be laid to rest.²

And as Lenin recommended for all serious revolutionaries:

The categorical requirement of Marxist theory in investigating any social question is that it be examined within *definite* historical limits, and, if it refers to a particular country . . . that account be taken of the specific features distinguishing that country from others in the same historical epoch.³

II. THE STRENGTHS OF LENINISM

AT FIRST GLANCE the similarities between the United States today and pre-revolutionary Russia or China seem slim. On the one hand, we are an advanced industrial nation, the leading imperialist power in the world; only five per cent of the United States' population is still in agriculture; the working class, which forms the bulk of the population, is literate and experienced in unions and other organizations, and has a long schooling in parliamentary democracy. On the other hand, Russia and China were underdeveloped, primarily agricultural nations, in which capitalism was a relatively new and weak arrival, led by foreign imperialists; the majority of the population were illiterate peasants, and even the urban working classes, a very small minority, had been prohibited from gaining much political or organizational experience. How can the strategy, organization, and tactics of revolutions in such dissimilar situations have anything in common?

There is a great deal of truth in this objection, as we will see in the next section of this paper. Not only must the specific forms and tactics of our movement be based on an analysis of our own society, but also the historical task of our revolution is profoundly different. For the United States, the revolution will inaugurate a qualitatively *different* kind of society. Because of our advanced technological base, an American revolution will involve an explosion in human possibility, a radical expansion in human freedom, a profound deepening of human

relationships, a redefinition of human labor; it will simultaneously mean that a socialist America can apply the most modern technology in a nonexploitative fashion to the conquest of humanity's ancient curses: worldwide hunger, disease, ignorance, brutal labor.

But despite the enormous differences between the third world and the United States, there are in very general terms important similarities between our situation and that of the Russian and Chinese Communists before their revolutions. Like them, we face the task of building a revolutionary movement in a period of general social disintegration and crisis in the capitalist system; like them, we are attempting to apply a rather abstract class analysis to a particular multi-racial nation within an international capitalist system, to a nation whose population is divided into diverse, socially distinct strata. These parallels lead us to accept some of the key theoretical and strategic principles of Leninism: the revolutionary spirit and determination to change history; the theoretical justification for political action and the critique of mechanistic determinism and pure spontaneity; the need for an alliance of all oppressed groups in the society; and the understanding of nationalism and imperialism as pivotal problems for our movement.

Lenin and Mao are, of course, admired for their success in leading revolutions, and for their roles in the movements that produced those revolutions. They and the parties they led did not come to power simply through coups or single crises, but through several decades of recurrent crises and continual struggle. The determination they maintained through those long periods of struggle is the most important "principle" of Lenin's and Mao's thought for us to adopt. In one of the best available summaries of Leninism, Lukács argues that "the core of Lenin's thought and his decisive link with Marx" is the belief in "the actuality of the revolution," the belief that revolution is a real historical possibility and that political action—the conscious, voluntary activity for socialism by revolutionaries—makes a huge and decisive difference.⁴ This is not to say that revolution is right around the corner, or will roll in with the next recession (indeed, no such thing was true throughout most of the Russian and Chinese Communists' pre-revolutionary struggles). Our belief in the "actuality" of the American revolution is rather a belief that life as capitalism offers it is increasingly unlivable and unacceptable to masses of people; that crises and disruptions of "normal" life will continue to be recurrent; that even though the easy militancy and

1. We have far greater reservations in the case of Russia than in the other cases, of course, about what the post-revolutionary government has become. Some of our ideas about the difference between Russia and China will be explained below. In no case is our admiration uncritical; we find it impossible to support China's entire foreign policy, for instance, despite our enthusiasm for what the revolution has done for life inside China. But in general, we identify with all the revolutions mentioned here as representing, on balance, very positive steps forward in world history.

It is sometimes suggested that anyone who identifies with the revolutions of China, Cuba, and Vietnam is "really" a Marxist-Leninist, since those countries are the vanguard of the worldwide Marxist-Leninist movement. Moreover, as we will discuss, we deeply value Lenin's contributions to revolutionary theory and practice. If that is what the term means, we surely are Leninists. But the more common usage defines Leninists as those who believe in the need for a vanguard party, modeled on the Bolshevik party organization. In this sense, we are clearly not Leninists.

2. Mao Tse-tung, "The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War."

3. Lenin, "Right of Nations to Self-Determination."

4. Georg Lukács, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought* (1924), especially chapter 1.

optimism of the sixties have subsided, people's anguish at capitalism and their action against their conditions of suffering will not vanish; that out of all of this, through decades of struggle, we can build socialism in the United States; and that what we do, even today, will affect the course and the chances for success of that struggle for socialism.

Successful revolutions have required vigorous political action. This seemingly obvious statement has in the past needed a theoretical rationale in defense against the exaggerated determinism and worship of spontaneity that sometimes appear as (distorted) versions of Marxism. If Marxists believe that the economic base of society determines everything that happens in the political, cultural, ideological superstructure, then what is there to do except wait for the contradictions in capitalism to mature, and to support the appearance of class consciousness and activism as they inevitably, spontaneously emerge?

Lenin and Mao are by no means alone among Marxists in rejecting mechanistic determinism, and arguing for the importance of conscious political action—Gramsci and many others have written extensively on this issue.⁵ Briefly, the reply to mechanistic determinism is that the economic base of society does not uniquely determine non-economic life, but rather defines a range of possibilities within which political action is decisive. For instance, the development of capitalism, and the emergence within it of contradictions and crises, have made socialism possible today (as it was not in, say, the sixteenth century) but have not made it inevitable. The slow disintegration, or even a total collapse, of capitalism only opens the way for "socialism or barbarism"; what we do can make a difference in deciding between those alternatives. More generally, as Antonio Gramsci, a major theoretician and founder of the Italian Communist Party, put it,

It may be ruled out that immediate economic crises of themselves produce fundamental historical events; they can simply create a terrain more favorable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving questions involving the entire subsequent development of national life.⁶

Lenin's views on this problem were developed in his controversy with "economism," a tendency among socialists to place primary emphasis on support for workers' spontaneous struggles over economic, trade-union-style issues, without introducing any "outside" political issues, in the belief that such struggles would naturally become political.⁷ (Some versions of localism on the American left today are very close to economism.) Lenin argued that economism underestimated the strength of bourgeois ideology:

But why, the reader may ask, does the spontaneous movement, the movement along the line of least resistance, lead to the domination of bourgeois ideology? For the simple reason that bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than Social-Democratic ideology; because it is more fully developed, and because it possesses immeasurably more opportunities for being distributed.⁸

Moreover, capitalists constantly distribute their ideas, interpreting every major event and development in a way which defuses and mystifies class conflict. A movement that did not explicitly challenge the dominant ideology would end up accommodating itself to the status quo, channeling workers' struggles away from opposition to capitalism and towards a narrow interest-group approach. Lenin's predictions have unfortunately been borne out in the history of the CIO unions;

started with the help of Communists who did not raise political issues in order to preserve "the unity of the labor movement," the CIO "spontaneously" moved to the right, not to the left. In the late 1940s, it expelled Communists and dedicated itself to the avowedly non-revolutionary goal of getting a little more for its members.⁹ To move the struggles of unions or other groups beyond a reformist, interest-group consciousness, there must be conscious political agitation by socialists in opposition to the constant agitation by defenders of capitalism.

As Lenin defended the importance of conscious political action by socialists, he was also aware of the significance of the ruling class's pervasive control. In fact, Lenin virtually rediscovered Marx's analysis of the class nature of the state.¹⁰ The activity of most socialist parties before World War I, with their heavy emphasis on running candidates for office, certainly tended to encourage the illusion that government was politically neutral in the class struggle, and that gradual accumulation of a socialist electoral majority could produce a peaceful transition to socialism. Against this illusion Lenin asserted that the state exists to defend the interests of the ruling class, and that even in the parliamentary democracies of North America and Western Europe,

the actual work of the "state" is done behind the scene and is carried on by the departments, the government offices, and the General Staffs [of the military]. Parliament itself is given up to talk for the special purpose of fooling the "common people."¹¹

The ruling class maintains its power whenever possible through the consent of the governed, through persuasion of the masses that the present order is inevitable and legitimate. Most of the people most of the time are cynical and apathetic,

5. See, for instance, Carl Boggs, Jr., "Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*," in *Socialist Revolution* 11 and 12, for an interesting discussion of Gramsci's views on this, and a comparison with Lenin and Mao.

6. From "The Modern Prince," in Boggs, *SR* 11, p. 108.

7. See Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*, parts II and III. In "Left-Wing Communism: The Reply to Lenin" (in *The Unknown Dimension*, edited by Dick Howard and Karl Klare), Stanley Aronowitz maintains that Lenin misrepresented the views of the leading Russian "economist," Akimov, who was actually closer to the position of Rosa Luxemburg. But Lenin's argument is still a valid one against a position that has often been popular on the left, even if it is more properly attributed to Alinsky than to Akimov. An interesting aspect of Lenin's critique of spontaneity was the parallel he drew between economism and terrorism: "The Economists and terrorists merely bow to different poles of spontaneity: the Economists bow to the spontaneity of the 'pure and simple' labor movement, while the terrorists bow to the spontaneity of the passionate indignation of the intellectuals, who are either incapable of linking up the revolutionary struggle with the labor movement, or lack the opportunity to do so" (*What Is To Be Done?*, III.D). This is not emphasized here because the decreased popularity of terrorism in the past two years makes it somewhat beside the point for the left.

8. *What Is To Be Done?*, II.B.

9. There is a vast literature on this subject; see, for instance, Staughton Lynd, "Prospects for the New Left" (in *Strategy and Program: Two Essays toward a New American Socialism*, by Staughton Lynd and Gar Alperovitz) for a very readable account. The theory of the limitations of apolitical unionism is discussed at length by André Gorz, in *Strategy for Labor* and other writings.

10. See *State and Revolution* and the works of Marx and Engels cited there.

11. *State and Revolution*, chapter 3, part 3. Like Lenin, we do not believe this rules out use of electoral campaigns for educational purposes; it only rules out primary reliance on an electoral strategy or anything else that would encourage the illusion of a primarily electoral route to socialism. Electoral involvement should be judged by its usefulness in educating and organizing people into a primarily non-electoral struggle, as we argue in the final section of this paper.

believing that nothing can be changed, "you can't fight city hall." When apathy gives way to activism, bourgeois ideology encourages people to see their demands in the narrowest, least revolutionary terms: surely the pluralist state, balancing the demands of conflicting interest groups, is the ideal mechanism for reconciling our differences? When, finally, movements begin to threaten the legitimacy of the system as a whole; the state also defends itself through force, using the repressive power of the police and the army.

The role capitalist culture plays in defending the status quo is more important in our society than it was in pre-revolutionary Russia or China. But ultimately, if we are successful in building a socialist movement, we will have to face the state's readiness to use force to repress us. One conclusion to be drawn from this is that the creation of socialism must ultimately involve the disintegration of the overwhelming police power of the state (as began to happen a few years ago with the impact of the anti-war and black liberation movements on the army; clearly the process will have to go much farther).¹² Another conclusion, which Lenin was able to realize in theory but not in practice, and which remains important for us today, is that socialism must destroy the repressive and bureaucratic apparatus of the capitalist state in order to make way for the new, and different forms of direct self-government.

In the very abstract model of capitalism (used by Marx throughout most of volume 1 of *Capital*) there are only two important classes in society, capitalists and industrial workers.¹³ Too often Marxists, especially those who most dogmatically present themselves as Leninists, have tried to use this model as a description of actual societies, disregarding or minimizing the significance of all other groups and all other divisions within the society. Marx and Engels never committed this error in their analyses of actual historical situations, and Lenin as well understood reality far better than many of his would-be followers. Pre-revolutionary Russia was a primarily agrarian country; the majority of the people were peasants, not industrial workers, and a revolutionary movement based solely on workers would inevitably be a minority movement. The peasants were no less oppressed and discontented than the workers, but their position in society made it impossible for them to lead the revolution. What was needed, therefore, was "the revolutionary alliance of all the oppressed,"¹⁴ led by the working class, but representing and unifying the interests of all oppressed groups. And what this required of socialists was pointing out the connections between all parts of society, and criticizing society as a whole; in Lenin's words,

The Social-Democrat's ideal should not be a trade-union secretary, but a *tribune of the people*, able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it takes place, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; he must be able to group all these manifestations into a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; he must be able to take advantage of every petty event in order to explain his socialistic convictions and his Social-Democratic demands to *all*, in order to explain to *all* and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat.¹⁵

In the following paragraphs Lenin goes on to urge more socialist agitation among all the classes of society and calls for support for a wide variety of movements,

for he who forgets that "the Communists support every

revolutionary movement," that we are obliged for that reason to expound and emphasize *general democratic tasks before the whole people*, without for a moment concealing our socialistic convictions, is not a Social-Democrat.¹⁶

It is the tragedy of the Russian revolution that the need for "the revolutionary alliance of all the oppressed," for socialists to become "tribunes of the people," was ultimately realized far less in practice than in theory. When the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917, they had a substantial base of support among urban workers, but virtually none in the peasantry. History did not give them a chance to develop peasant support after the revolution either: immediately after taking power the Bolsheviks were forced, largely by foreign intervention against them, to fight a four-year civil war. The Bolsheviks won the war, but at the cost of establishing a system of regimentation and military control far more extensive than their political support—a system which led directly to much of the later authoritarianism of the Soviet government. It remained for the Chinese Communists to create a successful example of "the revolutionary alliance of all the oppressed," to unify the vast majority of the country in the course of the revolution. The pattern of guerrilla warfare starting in the countryside permitted—in fact, required—the political and military strength of the revolution to grow simultaneously among the peasantry, ensuring that a Communist government would be a popular one when it came to power.

What lessons should the American left draw from this? That we must start guerrilla warfare in the countryside based on the American peasantry? That we must use the slogans and tactics of the Chinese, rather than the Russian, revolution? We would suggest that the lesson is that we must understand the American class structure, and build a movement that unifies and represents the interests of all oppressed groups in society, that wins broad-based support and involves the widest participation, before there can be any hope of the kind of revolution we want to see.

Though the American class structure is very different from that of Czarist Russia or Kuomintang China, it is no less affected by the problems of nationalism and imperialism. With some modifications, Lenin's analyses of these problems have a continuing validity for our situation.

Czarist Russia contained a multitude of national minorities;

12. The amount of violence that will be involved in the revolution is impossible to predict in advance; it depends in large part on how successfully we have united the population against the ruling class and its control of the state before any final confrontation takes place. As Wilhelm Reich argued, "The larger the mass base of the revolutionary movement, the less violence will be required, and the more, also, will the masses lose their fear of revolution. The increasing degree of influence of the revolutionary movement inside the army and the state apparatus has the same effect. For this reason the Russian revolution had only a minimum of casualties" (*SEX-POL, Essays 1929-34*). It is a serious mistake for revolutionaries to *advocate* violence; it may be a tragic necessity to defend the revolution with violence, when capitalists violate the victories and rights of the people, but violence is not something we generally encourage. And it is important for us to respect the natural fear people have of violence—a respect the Bolsheviks remarkably demonstrated in 1917. (See, for instance, Trotsky's account in *The Russian Revolution*.)

13. See Paul Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, chapter 1, for an excellent discussion of Marx's use of abstraction in *Capital*.

14. Lukács, *Lenin*, chapter 2.

15. *What Is To Be Done?*, III, E.

16. *Ibid.* "Social-Democrat" did not acquire its present connotation of "reformist" until after 1914; before that all Marxist parties, including the Bolsheviks, used the phrase to describe themselves.

according to Lenin only forty-three per cent of the population belonged to the dominant Great Russian nationality. Nationalist movements frequently appeared among the minorities: deciding how to relate to them was an important, much-debated question among socialists. Lenin's analysis can be summarized as follows:¹⁷ Strong capitalist nations always attempt to dominate and exploit weaker nations around them; thus national oppression is a basic aspect of the expansion of capitalism, a real form of oppression that socialists must oppose. At the same time, class differences within oppressed nations cannot be ignored: "There are two nations in every modern nation. . . . There are two national cultures in every national culture."¹⁸ Nationalist movements are frequently led by and express the interests of the bourgeoisies of oppressed nations, for whom national autonomy is a necessary step toward controlling "their own" economies. But whatever the leadership, the following of nationalist movements comes from the masses of the minority nations, who are protesting the very real oppression they experience, in a manner that need not be incompatible with socialist politics. Therefore, socialists should support the right of minorities to choose whether or not to secede, but should not advocate secession, and especially should not support bourgeois or cultural nationalism; more positively, socialists should try to express the solidarity of workers of the oppressed and oppressor nations, and to that end, should struggle against racism within the dominant nation.

Our situation is somewhat different from pre-revolutionary Russia: the largest oppressed "nation" within the United States, the Afro-American people, is far more geographically dispersed than were the minority nations of Russia, so that secession seems hardly plausible.¹⁹ Moreover, the greater development of capitalism, as well as the geographical dispersion of most minorities in the United States, reduces the opportunities for the appearance of minority "national bourgeoisies" (though such opportunities are partially recreated through the conscious efforts of the American ruling class).²⁰ The demand for secession of a geographical unit is thus normally replaced in this country with the demand for separatism: for an independent organizational, political, and cultural identity for a minority group. But with this change, Lenin's approach to nationalism still provides a model for how white socialists should relate to minorities today: we stand for solidarity between races, and for the struggle against racism within the dominant "nation"; we support the right to separatism when minorities feel it is necessary. Our position is subtly but importantly different from advocating separatism. We believe in the need for ultimate unity in the movement against a highly unified capitalist class and we welcome minority membership in our organization. We believe our members can be simultaneously effective in separate and unified movements. (Our position on separate feminist organizations is similar; the relationship of socialism and feminism is treated well in the political perspective and other writings of the NAM, in which it is made plain that separatism for women is often a political necessity, and should be supported by socialists who simultaneously believe in the basic unity of the struggle.)²¹

We mentioned above that the problem of national oppression is based on the tendency of strong capitalist nations to expand. The same tendency is the root of the problems of war and militarism. In dealing with these problems, particularly in explaining the origins of World War I and the reasons why socialists should oppose it, Lenin developed his well-known

analysis of imperialism.²² With some updating and changes in details, Lenin's theory of imperialism remains a sound and essential part of modern Marxism.

Capitalism is based on businesses' search for ever-greater profits. Geographical expansion has always been one of the strategies employed in this search.²³ United States capitalism, from its beginning up to the 1890s, expanded westward across North America, seizing half of Mexico and slaughtering native Americans in the process. In the twentieth century this expansion continued, into Latin America, Europe, the Pacific, and around the world. The decision as to whether new investments will be located at home or abroad is made strictly on the basis of profit, and there are reasons to expect that the capitalists of advanced industrial nations will find it profitable to invest in underdeveloped countries. As Lenin explained, "In these backward countries, profits usually are high, for capital is scarce, the price of land is relatively low, wages are low, raw materials are cheap."²⁴ Moreover, as the growing consternation about the "energy crisis" indicates, certain kinds of investments in fuel sources and raw materials in the third world are absolutely essential for capitalism.

Capitalist expansion is more than economic; national governments defend the interests of "their" capitalists around the world as well as at home. In Lenin's day this meant acquiring

17. See *National Liberation, Socialism and Imperialism*, a collection of Lenin's writings on the subject (International Publishers).

18. Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question."

19. It should be noted that this is a subtle and complicated question, whose solution cannot be entirely predicted in advance. For instance, several of the minority nations within the United States are clearly in a colonial situation both culturally and geographically—Puerto Rico, Native America (especially the Navajo tribe, which is by far the largest and occupies northeastern Arizona), Hawaii, the Eskimo lands. In some or all of these cases the development of the revolution may mean independence movements (indeed such is already the case in Puerto Rico).

20. See, for instance, Robert Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, for a superb treatment of how the ruling class creates a post-bourgeoisie within the black community.

21. C. L. R. James and Harold Cruse, writing from their experiences in national minority struggle, have enriched Marxism through their discussion of cultural forces in developing a revolutionary alternative and movement. More recently, feminist-socialist theorists have laid a groundwork for a far more powerful Marxist method by insisting upon the centrality of sexual politics, the family, and personal life to any revolutionary movement in advanced capitalism. See for example Juliet Mitchell, *Women's Estate*; Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Women and the Subversion of the Community," *Radical America*, vol. 6, no. 1; Eli Zaretsky, "Capitalism, the Family, and Personal Life," *Socialist Revolution* 13-14. Both reformulations of Marxism grew out of a "separatist" stance toward the "mainstream socialist tradition," which has greatly undervalued questions of sexual and racial oppression.

22. This analysis is presented in Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. It is sometimes argued that other authors such as Hobson, Hilferding, Luxemburg, and Bukharin presented the same analysis before Lenin did; see, for instance, Peter Karl Kresl, "Nikolai Bukharin on Economic Imperialism," *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 5, no. 1. We are not disputing such claims, only recognizing the fact that the theory of imperialism has come to be identified with Lenin, and is thus a part of "Leninism."

23. This is not to deny that there are other strategies for increasing profits, even in the age of monopoly capitalism; expansion into other industries and creation of new products and new needs through advertising and manipulation of consumers are widely employed today. But geographical expansion has always been important and has a number of advantages. It allows corporations to gain control of new markets, new sources of raw materials and new supplies of labor, and to exclude competitors from these resources. See Arthur MacEwan, "Capitalist Expansion, Ideology, and Intervention," *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 4, no. 1; and Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism*.

24. Lenin, *Imperialism*, chapter 4.

formal empires. Today it means neo-colonialism, an informal system of control that often involves *cultural* invasion and arrogance as well as economic (a stark and brutal aspect of American intervention in Indochina). Economic, political, cultural, and military expansion become interrelated; reactionary patriotism and racism are developed as ideologies of imperialism; the inevitable clashes result in war—among the imperialist powers in World War I, between the imperial powers and national liberation movements today. This analysis, which seems familiar today, was the position of only a small minority of the left in World War I. Most European socialists, for all their talk of internationalism, had supported their countries in war, inventing various excuses and claiming that other countries in the war were even more despotic than their own. Today we face different wars but similar issues. Today, no less than in Lenin's day, opposing capitalism means opposing imperialist war and neo-colonialism.

Summarizing our views on the strengths of Leninism, we have found that the apparently slight similarities of our situation to pre-revolutionary Russia do in fact justify substantial areas of agreement with Lenin's thought. We identify with Lenin's revolutionary spirit and determination; we agree with his critique of mechanistic determinism and economism, his writings on the nature of the state, his approach to creating a "revolutionary alliance of the oppressed," and his treatment of nationalism and imperialism.

Our agreement ends, however, when we turn to the analysis of the actual class structure of society, and of the type of organization and movement needed to transform it.

III. THE AMERICAN CLASS STRUCTURE AND THE WEAKNESSES OF AMERICAN LENINISM

IN THIS SECTION we examine the weaknesses of Leninism for present-day American revolutionaries. Our disagreements are not as much with Lenin as with those who call themselves Leninists in the United States today, although as we will discuss, we do differ with Lenin on some subjects. But it is important to distinguish, as most American Leninists do not, between the universally applicable aspects of Lenin's thought (the subject of the last section) and the aspects which are specific to the Russian situation. Not to do so can lead to serious political mistakes when adopted in a very different situation.

The enormous differences in class structure and level of industrialization between the United States today and pre-revolutionary Russia or China require a different kind of organization and tactics, and dictate different revolutionary goals. In this part of the paper we will discuss our criticism of American Leninism in four subsections: the first two respond to two major arguments for the Leninist form of vanguard party; the third presents our analysis of the American class structure; and the fourth outlines the revolutionary process that we believe will characterize the United States.

Leninism has come to mean a belief that the revolution must be led by a vanguard party modeled on the Bolshevik party organization. The Bolshevik model was based as much as possible on full-time professional revolutionaries. Its leadership, its internal structure and debates, and its methods of decision-making were kept secret from non-members. The party enforced tight discipline and centralization throughout its ranks; "democratic centralism" meant freedom to disagree in the party's internal debates, but a duty to support the "line" and

not express present or former disagreement once the party had reached a decision. Splits and purges occurred whenever necessary to keep the party united and ready for action.

The arguments for this form of party are rarely stated clearly: they seem to rest on the following sets of ideas. First, a movement for socialism will not emerge spontaneously from economic struggles; a conscious, explicitly socialist organization is necessary. Second, secrecy, tight organization and hierarchy are necessary characteristics of an organization combating a repressive state power. And third, socialist ideology does not originate within the working class; it must be brought from "outside," by intellectuals of bourgeois origin who have become revolutionaries. Though often connected and confused with each other, these three arguments are separable. We have explained above our agreement with the first: Lenin's critique of economism is a persuasive argument for an explicitly socialist organization. But this alone tells us little about what kind of organization it should be. We disagree with the second and third; they describe a party that was appropriate to Czarist Russia, and in modified form to China and much of the third world, but one that is not appropriate in the United States today.

A. *The secret, hierarchical party*

IN THE DEBATES over the Leninist form of party organization, it is usually forgotten how completely Lenin based the need for a "Leninist party" on the specific conditions existing in Russia, particularly on the difficulties of public organization in the face of a dictatorial, repressive government. Lenin's views on party organization are set forth in part 4 of *What Is To Be Done?*, which is the source for the following series of quotations.

Lenin repeatedly contrasted the organizational forms appropriate to Germany or other parliamentary democracies with the forms necessary to Russia. Unions faced severe repression in Russia, and had to be based on a "small, compact core" of workers who do the administrative work and do not keep written membership records for fear of police: "Only an incorrigible utopian would want a *wide* organization of workers, with elections, reports, universal suffrage, etc. under the autocracy." When it comes to the organization of revolutionaries, the problem is even more severe:

In a country with an autocratic government, the more we *restrict* the membership of this organization to persons who are engaged in revolutionary activities as a profession and who have been professionally trained in the art of combating the political police, the more difficult will it be to catch the organization.

Lenin described approvingly the easy, natural manner in which politically active workers could be recruited to the party in Germany, and compared it to Russia:

What takes place very largely automatically in a politically free country must in Russia be done deliberately and systematically by our organizations. A working man agitator who is at all talented and "promising" *must not be left* to work eleven hours a day in a factory. We must arrange that he be maintained by the party, that he may in due time go underground, that he change the place of his activity, otherwise he will not enlarge his experience, he will not widen his outlook, and will not be able to stay in the fight against the gendarmes. . . .

Finally, Lenin outlined his views on democracy within the party in answering a faction which called for "broad democratic principles of Party organization":

Everyone will probably agree that "broad democratic principles" presuppose the two following conditions: first, full publicity, and second, election to all functions. It would be absurd to speak about democracy without publicity, that is, a publicity that extends beyond the circle of the membership of the organization.

We call the German Socialist Party a democratic organization because all it does is done publicly; even its Party congresses are held in public. But no one would call an organization that is hidden from everyone but its members by a veil of secrecy, a democratic organization. What is the use of advancing "broad democratic principles" when the fundamental condition for these principles *cannot be fulfilled* by a secret organization?

It is difficult to elect leaders in a secret organization:

In politically free countries, this condition is taken for granted. "Membership of the Party is open to those who accept the principles of the Party program, and render all the support they can to the Party"—says point 1 of the rules of the German Social-Democratic Party.

This public membership and unhampered publicity about candidates for leadership is necessary for meaningful elections in the party:

Consequently, knowing all the facts of the case, *every* Party member can decide for himself whether or not to elect this person for a certain Party office.

Clearly the German party structure was impossible in Russia:

Try to put this picture in the frame of our autocracy! Is it possible in Russia for all those "who accept the principles of the Party program and render all the support they can to the Party" to control every action of the revolutionist, working in secret? Is it possible for all the revolutionaries to elect one of their number to any particular office, when in the very interests of the work, he *must* conceal his identity from nine out of ten of these "all"? Ponder a little over the real meaning of the high-sounding phrases . . . and you will realize that "broad democracy" in Party organization, amidst the gloom of autocracy and the domination of the gendarmes, is nothing more than a *useless and harmful toy*.

In Russia seventy years ago it was necessary to argue that an organization suited to a bourgeois democracy was not suited to an autocracy; in the United States today it is necessary to argue just the reverse. Lenin's position does not advocate a "Leninist party" as an alternative to "broad democratic principles" and a publicly democratic organization in all circumstances; only in autocratic Russia.

Many countries today, especially in the third world, have political systems quite similar to that of Czarist Russia; for such countries, Lenin's arguments for the Bolshevik party organization make sense. The military-type structure of command within the party seems particularly appropriate to guerrilla warfare. It does not seem accidental that Leninist parties have succeeded in leading revolutions with peasant-based guerrilla warfare strategies in China and Vietnam, but have universally failed to find a strategy for revolution based on the urban working class in advanced industrial countries.²⁵ It should be noted that the period of greatest success of the Communist

parties in Western Europe came during the resistance to German occupation in World War II, the time when their situation most closely resembled the guerrilla warfare against dictatorship.

It is possible that the United States will in the future move to a more dictatorial system, in which case the argument for a secret, tightly disciplined party with a military-type command structure would be more plausible. But that is not the situation today. A serious threat from the left, which might conceivably make the ruling class abandon parliamentary democracy, is not presently on the horizon. Given that an overtly autocratic government is a distant possibility, our priority is not to act as if it has already happened. The central work before us is the building of an open, revolutionary movement, and to begin that process we need networks of people who have worked together and can trust each other. We need an organization that has the understanding and support of masses of people. With this substantive political basis, new forms can be developed as new situations approach; without this basis, the most perfect forms of a secret, underground party will not make us a success.

To be taken seriously as a movement that wants to transform society, that wants to make the United States genuinely democratic, we need an organization that is *more* democratic than others, an organization that creates within itself the substance as well as the forms of democratic participation, even as it struggles to change the larger society. It will not help us to have to explain to the American people that although we could form a public and democratic organization, we have instead chosen to protect ourselves against possible future repression by forming a secret, tightly disciplined organization, whose leadership and internal discussions are hidden from view but may produce changes in our "line" at any time. To most people such a party would seem, if not a joke, one more remote, unresponsive bureaucracy trying to tell them what to do. Our form of revolution must be different because the nature of our revolution is different and the forms of ruling-class control are different.

Marx developed the idea of "false consciousness" to explain how the oppressed *accept* an entire world view that is clearly not in their interest, that is often patently self-destructive. The ruling class dominates the culture of a society; in Marx's words, "The ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, the ruling ideas: i.e., the class that is the dominant material force in society is at the same time its dominant intellectual force."²⁶ "False consciousness" in advanced capitalism, bourgeois ideology, is a set of sometimes contradictory ideas that legitimize the capitalist status quo and redirect the hostility and frustrations that capitalism causes away from the system, toward other oppressed groups, and inward, toward ourselves. A basic principle of these ideas is to judge people, including yourself, by what people earn. There is "something wrong" with a man who can't support a family; housewives, who earn nothing, have to be supported. People who earn less than you are lazy; even worse, if they're on welfare they're living off your taxes in-

25. The argument that a Leninist party is appropriate in third-world countries but not in the United States is developed in Raymond Franklin, "Party and Class—State and Revolution." We have found this paper helpful, although we disagree about what is needed for the United States.

26. *German Ideology*. Antonio Gramsci especially developed the idea of bourgeois cultural "hegemony" with his discussion of the ideological role of intellectuals and the idea of common sense, to which our model closely corresponds.

stead of earning an honest living. This of course helps to perpetuate racism and sexism and encourages resentment and scapegoating of those "below you" in economic status. And "you are what you earn" fits well with consumerism, the belief that satisfaction is to be found primarily in passive individual consumption.

When it comes to political issues, bourgeois ideology is based on cynicism and distortions. Major change is impossible, you can't fight city hall. Minor reforms are possible as long as you work within the system. This system may not be so great, but socialism means dictatorship: they'll take away your car, your home, your right to go to church, your right to run for president. Besides, socialist ideals are impossible because people are basically competitive and out for money; we need bosses to make us work, we need traditional sex roles to keep families together and teach people "their places," we need repressive schools to make us get an education.

Bourgeois ideology inundates us all, through the media, schools, churches, etc. But its strength is not simply based on its constant repetition. It makes a certain kind of sense. It is a set of ideas people are taught and partially work out for themselves as they attempt to "do the best they can" within the context of "games" defined by the ruling class; it provides a way of making sense out of, rationalizing and reconciling oneself to a painful and contradictory reality in the absence of a revolutionary alternative. If the number of jobs can't be increased, then men and women, whites and racial minorities are in competition for jobs. If the amount of taxes and who pays them can't be changed, welfare and services for the poor do come out of working people's taxes (though of course they are dwarfed by the military budget). If nobody pays attention to you if you don't have money or consume a lot, then it "makes sense" to buy clothes or a new car or spend hours in the hair dresser's.²⁷

People's fragmented and competitive view of reality depends upon patterns of self-doubt, submission, and self-censorship we all learn. People don't expect very much out of life; they have little experience with real community, creative work, critical thinking. Children run a gauntlet of judgments for years of school; the mass media constantly trivialize and trample on our deepest needs and fears, our most basic sense of dignity; people are the constant victims of messages which belittle, make fun of, and condemn their independence, initiative, rebelliousness.

But it is precisely here where "Leninism" in the United States tends to reflect the very capitalist assumptions and values that the revolution must fight. On the one hand, many Leninists applaud the "discipline" that workers learn in the factory, seeing it as preparation for the discipline and self-sacrifice workers will need to accept the "leadership of the vanguard," smash capitalism, and build the proletarian state. Rosa Luxemburg captured the contradiction in this idea:

We misuse words and we practice self-deception when we apply the same term—discipline—to such dissimilar notions as (1) the absence of thought and will in a body with a thousand automatically moving hands and legs [the factory] and (2) the spontaneous coordination of the conscious political acts of a body of men. What is there in common between the regulated docility of an oppressed class, and the self-discipline and organization of a class struggling for its emancipation?²⁸

On the other hand, Leninist parties adopt the same authoritarianism in their internal functioning. The "rank and file" tends to adopt the leadership of the central bodies uncritically, certain "principles" become unquestionable, beyond the realm of examination. In a limited sense, such an environment does sometimes generate "faithful service" and "devotion to duty" (as a friend recently commented, "People tend to work better when they are handed out assignments"). But such organizational efficiency sacrifices more subtle necessities in the revolution in advanced capitalism. The more revolutionaries relearn submissiveness, the more limited is their participation in the process of criticism and rebellion against capitalist values. In modern capitalism, revolutionaries must learn to probe their fears and doubts, and to develop a wide-ranging sensitivity to the feelings and hidden aspirations of others. Instead of assuming the role of a new kind of "psychic police," revolutionaries must take the opposite course, learning how to "open up" all forbidden and illicit realms. The fact that some socialists argue that the only alternative to an authoritarian environment is individualism reflects the hopelessness that still pervades socialist ranks. In fact, the only way to guarantee commitment, and even more importantly, to develop the imaginative and flexible commitment necessary in the United States, is to develop rigorous collective democracy, openness to interpersonal relationships, broad and open links to people outside the organization, and a highly developed method of mutual criticism and support.

Under a clearly unpopular dictatorship, revolutionaries can safely assume that they have extensive passive support from people who oppose the government but are afraid to act. But in advanced capitalist conditions, the rule of the capitalists is masked behind values and beliefs that people have internalized, an entire "ordering" of reality. Ruling class ideology is a bulwark of class rule in third-world countries, and revolutionaries had to counter it in Russia and China. Indeed, it is part of the enormous legacy of Lenin and Mao that they insisted upon the necessity of political advocacy in opposition to the dominant culture, as we have argued. Nonetheless, in those countries, and in many third-world countries today, the situation was and is far different from that we face: imperialists, deeply hated by the masses of people, were seen in open collusion with the indigenous ruling class; imperialist intervention for many years had been "spontaneously" undermining the legitimacy of the ruling classes and their state, and had dramatically polarized the entire society. The task remained for revolutionaries to organize, cohere, and politicize the opposition that masses of people already felt, and, in an autocratic political environment, to organize military struggle against the state. (Indeed, the situation varies greatly from country to country even in the third world; thus, for instance, the Cuban revolutionaries' direct military strategy, so successful in Cuba itself, was a dismal fail-

²⁷ Michael Mann, in an article in the *American Sociological Review* ("The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy," vol. 35, no. 3) examined the idea of "false consciousness" in light of research on attitudes in the United States and England. His conclusions suggested a pattern strikingly like Gramsci's idea of common sense—operational militancy on a number of immediate issues; interest-group consciousness and conservatism in terms of people's view of the total society. Such findings certainly validate Lenin's thesis that socialists must constantly relate specific grievances to a criticism of the system as a whole, constantly showing how they are linked together.

²⁸ Rosa Luxemburg, "Organizational Questions of Social-Democracy."

ure in Bolivia.²⁹

But in our society, where domination is primarily based on an internalized ideology, where fear of government's physical power is less important than cynicism, passivity, and self-doubt, we do not need a secret party but an open and democratic organization that encourages mass participation. For only with the active involvement of the vast majority of the population can the internalized control of bourgeois culture be smashed, and a popular, democratic socialist society be created.

B. *Bringing consciousness to the working class from outside*

ON THIS POINT Lenin makes himself clear:

The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness. . . . The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals.³⁰

The implication is that the party would be initiated outside the working class, by intellectuals who have become socialists. Though the party recruits workers, it recruits them into a life quite distinct from that of "ordinary workers"; the revolutionary organization is made up of "self-less cadre," as many as possible full-time revolutionaries. American Leninists have adopted this view of cadre organization and argue for it on the basis of their understanding of the class structure, a particular understanding they all share despite wide political differences on other points.

This understanding is based on several misconceptions. First there is the mistaken argument that factory workers are the uniquely leading sector of the revolution. Second, there is the unacceptable use of theories about the "aristocracy of labor" and "middle-class elements" to explain the failure of factory workers to become revolutionary. Finally there is the often counterproductive conclusion that American revolutionaries need a Leninist cadre party to be politically effective.

1. THE AMERICAN LENINIST misunderstanding of the working class stems from the idea that industrial workers must lead the revolution. As in Russia, the party will lead the industrial workers, who will lead the rest of the population. In Russia this made sense—it was appropriate to see the industrial working class leading the peasantry in "the revolutionary alliance of all the oppressed."

One might suspect this analysis would be more applicable to some underdeveloped countries than to the United States. But even in China after 1927, the Communists rejected the Russian strategy of urban workers leading the peasants, and formulated their own strategy based on their own conditions, the rural, peasant-based guerrilla warfare that ultimately led to success.³¹ And the Russian class analysis is even more obviously wrong for the United States than it was for China: most of the American people are clearly not peasants.

The American Leninists' theory of industrial workers as the leading sector of the revolution may originate in too literal an adoption of the Russian scenario. But it also has a more current justification. It is claimed first that only industrial workers are "productive" workers, producing surplus value for capitalists; second that only industrial workers are organized in such a fashion that they attain "clear" consciousness of their collec-

tive oppression; and finally, that only industrial workers have the power to paralyze capitalism, to really "shut it down" when they strike. The Revolutionary Union, a "Maoist" group, puts it as well as any when it says the movement that will lead to socialism

will be led by working people at the point of production . . . because only workers at the point of production, and particularly black and brown workers, have the power to shut the country down, take over the factories, and run them in the interests of all working people.³²

First, the idea that only certain workers are "productive" has a long and confusing history in Marxist theory. Marx used the term to distinguish those who produce surplus value (roughly, profits) for their employers from those who are simply part of the "retinue" of the rich, such as servants. Only the misuse of Marx's very abstract model of capitalism could lead to the identification of "productive workers" as simply industrial workers. In fact, Marx emphasized the broadness of this definition and how little it had to do with the usefulness of the work performed:

An actor, for example, or even a clown, according to this definition is a productive laborer if he works in the service of a capitalist to whom he returns more labor than he received from him in the form of wages; while a jobbing tailor who comes to the capitalist's house and patches his trousers for him is an unproductive laborer.³³

Second, the organization of the workplace does create a basis for socialist consciousness among industrial workers. But the conditions of industrial workers are not unique in this respect. More recently the same process occurs in other workplace settings and in many other institutions—wherever capitalism forces people into collective patterns of life and work according to its own logic. This provides the basis for the collective action and consciousness of students and service, clerical, and technical workers, as well as of prisoners, soldiers, and old people.

Finally, the idea that only industrial workers can paralyze capitalism is easily disproved. In the last few years, United States capitalists have been content to watch lengthy strikes at such manufacturing giants as General Motors and General Electric, without the least thought of intervention by the state. On the other hand, strikes in transportation and communications, of truck drivers, airplane pilots, longshoremen, railroad workers, postal workers, and telephone operators, apparently terrify the rulers of America and often lead to government intervention to break the strikes and enforce arbitration. Does the increased dependence of all sectors of the economy on the transportation and communications industries make the workers in these industries the leading sector of the revolution? Are postal

29. Gramsci always made the distinction between societies where police power was dominant and the world view of the ruling class was fragmented or undermined, and capitalist societies dominated by well-developed and coherent ideology. See, for instance, Eugene Genovese's discussion in "On Antonio Gramsci," *Studies on the Left*, vol. 7, no. 2.

30. *What Is To Be Done?*, section II.A.

31. See, for instance, Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, chapter on China.

32. In *A Selection from the Red Papers 1, 2, and 3*.

33. Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, part 1. For an exhaustive treatment of Marx's views on productive workers and their political role, see Ian Gough, "Marx and Productive Labor," in *New Left Review* 76. Gough concludes that no simple political guidelines can be drawn from Marx's view, except that productive workers are a necessary part of the revolutionary movement.

workers "objectively" in more of a vanguard role than auto workers because postal strikes are more swiftly paralyzing to the economy than auto strikes?

The whole theory that those who can shut down the economy are the vanguard is in error: it dramatically oversimplifies the many aspects of the socialist revolution. What we must do is not simply "shut it down" but shut down American capitalism in such a fashion that we can open it up as a socialist democracy. And that will require the support and participation of the many sectors of the working class, making up the huge majority of the American people.

Lenin's critique of economism applied to the present American situation suggests quite different conclusions from those drawn by Leninists. For Lenin was emphatic in insisting that revolutionary consciousness develops outside the immediate situation of any particular groups of workers, in the conflict between all the oppressed and the state:

Class consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relations of *all* classes and strata to the state and government, the sphere of the interrelations between all classes.³⁴

American Leninists, with their overemphasis of the "industrial working class" and the supremacy of "point of production" organizing, can thus be seen as economist in Lenin's terms. The task of the revolutionary organization must be to spread its roots in the diverse settings of the class for the sake of building a united movement that can challenge capitalism as a total system: its ideology, its institutions, and its state.

2. WE ARGUED ABOVE that bourgeois ideology is a crucial dimension of ruling-class control, made especially effective because workers internalize it as a means of "survival," a way of rationalizing a painful existence when there is no visible alternative. American Leninists, however, all too often assume quite a different basis for false consciousness. Reading their literature and talking to them, one gathers that the instinctively revolutionary nature of the working class is always about to surface, held back only by misleadership and wrong ideas. These "wrong ideas" are often described as a "smokescreen" created by the ruling class and its lackeys; as one overenthusiastic young sympathizer of a Leninist group said, "The ruling class sure thought up a good one when they thought up racism." Given such a perspective, Leninists believe the party must denounce all forms of misleadership and wrong ideas, whether they originate from politicians, academics, union officials, or even other left groups.³⁵

In explaining the presently non-revolutionary state of the working class, Leninists suggest that the (otherwise pure) masses of workers have been misled especially by an "aristocracy of labor" or by "middle-class elements." These categories play a powerful role in American Leninist thought but in fact they are not based in the reality of the existing social structure and serve only to distort our understanding.

The "aristocracy of labor" idea was part of Lenin's theory of imperialism. He developed the idea in attempting to explain the traumatic events of 1914, when most European socialists supported their governments in World War I. According to Lenin,

Imperialism . . . which means high monopoly profits for a handful of very rich countries, creates the economic possibility of corrupting the upper strata of the proletariat. . . . Imperialism has the tendency of creating privileged sections even among the workers, and of detaching them from the main proletarian masses.³⁶

It is these privileged sections of the working class, the "aristocracy of labor," that came to dominate unions and moderate socialist parties, and misled the main proletarian masses into support for imperialism and the status quo. Lenin's conclusion was that revolutionaries must "go down lower and deeper, to the real masses."³⁷

For all that has been written about the aristocracy of labor, little effort has gone into providing evidence that a particular elite of workers enjoys benefit from imperialist profits.³⁸ In his evaluation of the "aristocracy of labor" theory, Eric Hobsbawm suggests that it was more applicable to late nineteenth-century Britain than to other times and places, and concludes:

Today, when it is possible to separate what is of permanent relevance in Lenin's argument from what reflects the limits of his information or the requirements of a specific political situation, we are in a position to see his writings in historical perspective. If we try to judge his work on the "aristocracy of labor" in such a perspective, we may well conclude that his writings of 1914-16 are somewhat less satisfactory than the profound line of thought which he pursued consistently from *What Is To Be Done?* to . . . 1920. . . . The more general argument about the dangers of "spontaneity" and "selfish" economism in the trade-union movement, though illustrated by the historic example of the late nineteenth-century British labor aristocracy, retains all its force.³⁹

Currently the concept of "middle-class elements" in labor and socialist movements is often used to play the same theoretical role as the "aristocracy of labor," a more privileged, outside group, misleading the "real masses." Indeed, "middle class," or even worse, "petty bourgeois," has come to be one of the most common invectives in left debates.

In classical Marxist theory, the middle class, or petit-bourgeoisie, referred to those groups that stood between the big bourgeoisie and the working class: those who owned a moderate amount of income-earning property, but not enough to live on their profits without working. The small store-owner or farmer who works alongside a few employees is a typical representative of this class. The petit-bourgeoisie was said to be a "middle" class politically because of its contradictory class interests; on the one hand, it is in a clearly subordinate position to the big bourgeoisie, prevented from ever attaining

34. *What Is To Be Done?*, III.E. James Weinstein in the June 1973 issue of the NAM newspaper has an analysis that reflects this critique of Lenin's.

35. This approach reaches its most self-destructive conclusion in internecine left warfare, with different Leninist groups accusing each other of being a major, or even the major, cause of working-class conservatism.

36. Lenin, *Imperialism*, chapter 8.

37. Quoted in Eric Hobsbawm, "Lenin and the 'Aristocracy of Labor,'" *Monthly Review*, April 1970. Hobsbawm provides an excellent treatment of the whole question.

38. André Gorz outlines what would be required to demonstrate the existence of an aristocracy of labor, and doubts that it can be done, in *Socialism and Revolution*, pp. 3-10.

39. Hobsbawm, "Lenin and the 'Aristocracy of Labor.'" See also Hobsbawm's *Laboring Men* for essays on British labor and the aristocracy of labor theory. Other interesting articles on the subject can be found in the April and June 1970 issues of *Monthly Review*.

real economic or political importance; on the other hand, as a property-owning class it fears the attack of the propertyless masses. Because of these contradictory interests, the petit-bourgeoisie may be politically vacillating, shifting between radical and conservative positions as class alliances change.

"Middle class" does not, to Marxists, mean "middle income." (What bourgeois sociologists have done with the term is another matter entirely.) "Middle class" refers, rather, to a relationship to property, to the means of production. In the United States today, the middle class, by this definition, includes a wide range of income levels, overlapping with working class incomes. Though, of course, the middle class has a higher average income, both classes include a wide range around their averages.⁴⁰ Too many leftists use "middle class" to refer to anyone above median income, as if such income surely taints class consciousness. They believe the "real masses" are only to be found "lower and deeper" in the income distribution. Marx himself did not explain class consciousness as a result of income, but rather as a product of the relationships of production. In a well-known passage in *Capital*, he describes the worsening of working conditions and alienation with the progress of capitalism, and concludes that the life of the worker, "be his payment high or low," must steadily grow worse. And Marx and Lenin both identified the most revolutionary class in Europe as the working class, because of its position in production, rather than the clearly much poorer peasantry.⁴¹

In criticizing the theory of the aristocracy of labor and middle-class contagion of the "pure" working class, we don't suggest, of course, that the revolutionary organization abandon political advocacy and debate. As Marx said, "The call to abandon . . . illusion . . . is a call to abandon the conditions that require illusion."⁴²

3. SOME OF THE MOST DIFFICULT and emotionally charged questions facing the left have to do with the sources and the consequences of revolutionary commitment. On the one hand, it is hard to remain committed to radicalism. The pressures against activism are immense and incessant. Where do revolutionaries come from? How can we become, and stay, "serious" about politics? How can anyone endure a radical awareness of suffering in the face of the enormous obstacles and disappointments to be overcome?

On the other hand, the very process of developing commitment transforms revolutionaries in unintended ways. The struggle to be politically "effective" can lead to cold and impersonal activity. As Brecht said in a poem about resistance to the Nazis:

Indeed I live in the dark age.
A guileless word is an absurdity. A smooth
forehead betokens
A hard heart. He who laughs has not yet
heard
The terrible tidings.

Ah, what an age it is
When to speak of trees is almost a crime
For it is a kind of silence about injustice!
And he who walks calmly across the street,
Is he not out of reach of his friends
In trouble?....

I came to the cities in time of disorder

When hunger ruled.
I came among men in a time of uprising
And I revolted with them.
So the time passed away
Which on earth was given me.

I ate my food between massacres.
The shadow of murder lay upon my sleep.
And when I loved, I loved with indifference.
I looked upon my nature with impatience.
So the time passed away
Which on earth was given me....

You, who shall emerge from the flood
In which we are sinking
Think --
When you speak of our weaknesses,
Also of the dark time
That brought them forth....
For we knew only too well:
Even the hatred of squalor
Makes the brow grow stern.
Even anger against injustice
Makes the voice grow harsh. Alas, we
Who wished to lay the foundations of kind-
ness
Could not ourselves be kind.

But you, when at last it comes to pass
That man can help his fellow man,
Do not judge us
Too harshly.

Furthermore the development of a group sense of commitment often leads to collective stereotypes and distortions of reality; such distortions are reinforced through the same group process that develops commitment. How can we stay sensitive and humane as well as effective, realistic as well as dedicated? This is not a luxury or a personal distraction from the building of a revolutionary movement: there are too many examples of small groups of unquestioned dedication and commitment, doomed to futility by their hostile styles of relating to people, and by their collective fantasies about how to talk to the working class.

Much of the appeal of the Leninist party lies in the answers it offers to the first set of questions, the problem of commitment. The party discipline, the tightness, the maintenance of a "pure" and uniform line, aims to create a world apart from the pressures of daily life, a world in which revolutionary commitment can be continually developed. As Trotsky described the self-steeling process the Bolsheviks went through,

Bolshevism created the type of the authentic revolution-ist who subordinates to historic goals irreconcilable with contemporary society the conditions of his personal existence, his ideas, and his moral judgment. The necessary

40. For an attempt to identify middle-class incomes according to a definition much like the one used here, see Ackerman, Birnbaum, Wetzler, and Zimbalist, "Income Distribution in the United States," *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 3, no. 3.

41. Many sources document the absence of a simple correlation between poverty and revolutionary potential. One of the most interesting is the conclusion to Eric Wolf's *Peasant Wars*, in which it is explained why the poorest peasants are often not the most revolutionary. This is especially true now, when revolutionary motivation grows from a variety of conditions, as we will argue in section D.

42. *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right."*

distance from bourgeois ideology was kept up in the party by a vigilant irreconcilability . . . by a process of selection and education, and in continual struggle, the Bolshevik party created not only a political but a moral medium of its own, independent of bourgeois social opinion and implacably opposed to it."⁴³

But the Leninist party, as it exists in the United States today, fails to answer the second set of questions, on the consequences of commitment. In fact it fails for exactly the same reasons that it seems to succeed in creating commitment. The Leninist conception of a tightly defined cadre bringing to the working class a consciousness developed outside the daily life of the class is not appropriate to the American working class today. In fact the Leninist approach to organization has often proved counterproductive; it has created a political language and a political focus which hastened the collapse of the left of the 1960s. The cure for the problem of commitment has turned out to reflect and intensify the disease.

In this section we argue against the Leninist form of party for the United States, as follows: first, the Leninist party was appropriate and necessary to the conditions of pre-revolutionary Russia and China; second, the "new turn toward Leninism" in the United States in recent years is based on very different conditions; third, this "new Leninism" denies many of the feelings that make people revolutionaries, and misunderstands important parts of the American working class; finally, it is therefore necessary to develop new forms of organization, and new methods for maintaining political commitment, if we are to make a revolution in the United States.

In an underdeveloped country, an elitist conception of the party may be unavoidable. In Czarist Russia, it made sense to think that specially trained cadre were needed to run an organization. In addition to the ways in which the dictatorship prevented public organization, discussed above, the experience and education of the working class made mass participation difficult. Russian workers were recently of peasant origin, with little or no education, no tradition of experience in unions or voluntary organizations, and no political participation of any sort. Moreover, intellectuals in a country like Russia were in an elite position. They had time to read and think, time to develop a fundamental opposition to the whole society. They felt a sharp contrast between their ideas of what "intellectuals" should be doing in service to their country and the reality of backward, semi-feudal conditions.

Yet intellectuals also experienced enormous relative material privilege. If they were to become and remain revolutionary, it would require the most rigorous training and collective discipline. After the revolution, as well, third-world countries may require a form of revolutionary asceticism, due to conditions of material poverty. Individuals may necessarily give up much of their personal will and needs to the collective project of military struggle and capital accumulation. In this case, the ascetic restructuring of intellectuals' personalities involved in "party discipline" is a method of lessening the cultural distance between themselves and the masses.

Supporters of the Leninist form of party in North America and Europe seem to assume that the same arguments apply to their countries today. Thus Robin Blackburn wrote in defense of the Leninist party in advanced capitalism:

The charge that the Leninist Party is elitist is in a way true. But then capitalism generates the most harsh inequalities in opportunities of every sort, because there is

vastly unequal provision of education, culture, and free time. . . . In other words certain people have the privilege of being able to devote themselves to the revolution and perhaps sacrifice themselves to it in order that a classless society be created.⁴⁴

As Blackburn admits, this is an elitist conception of the party. We, the revolutionary cadre, it says, are entirely different kinds of people from the workers around us, more able to sacrifice ourselves, more able to maintain correct ideas, more able to lead.

Though this view may be necessary for underdeveloped countries, it is not valid in an advanced capitalist society. The "new turn toward Leninism" that began among American students and ex-students in the late 1960s, and continues today, has a somewhat different basis than "classical" Leninism had: objectively it is based on the exaggerated isolation of campus life from the adult working class; subjectively it is based in the collapse of the student left of the sixties.

There is a material basis for the remoteness students feel from other oppressed groups. Campus life is very different from the life of adult workers, even from the life of college-educated workers: no fixed work routine, no family responsibilities, often no hassles about commuting or shopping, sometimes even no need to worry about where money is coming from for four years. Such conditions are, moreover, preserved for an indefinite length of time in the "ex-student ghettos" that form around major university centers and that were populated in part in the late sixties by radicals and "counter-culturalists." And of course students are taught to think of themselves as different from those who don't go to college. Such an atmosphere naturally encourages the growth of versions of Leninism that exaggerate the distance between "intellectuals" and "masses."

In the late sixties a number of developments within the new left and in the "outside" society created deepening disillusionment and bitterness. Instead of remaining focused on the basic revolutionary task—building a mass revolutionary movement—the new left by the end of the sixties increasingly reflected many of the worst aspects of capitalism. It demonstrated contempt for non-radicals. Sects were contemptuous and scornful toward each other. Prevailing opinion evaluated people's value according to their rhetoric, their disruptiveness, their hostility. The experiences of countless people in the new left came to be filled with guilt, doubt, and fear of politics. Meanwhile, the most visible sections of the movement continued to fantasize about "instant revolution" and revolt based on college campuses: in the ultimate expression of that fantasy, some student "leaders" proclaimed that the revolution had actually arrived during the May 1970 campus strikes.

Such pain and delusion within the left dovetailed with the increasing repression under Nixon. Many in SDS who remained committed to revolutionary change came to understand the new left as full of fantasy, self-indulgent, elitist. A lifelong commitment to revolution demanded an end to pretense and a new kind of seriousness. In addition, the isolation and ridicule radicals experienced even at the hands of other radicals created enormously powerful needs for tight communities, "hardened against bourgeois encroachments," in which people

43. Trotsky, *The Russian Revolution*, vol. 3, chapter 5.

44. Robin Blackburn, "Revolutionary Theory: The New Left and Lenin," *Leviathan*, vol. 1, no. 6.

could be valued and supported and have their commitment sustained.

Given these objective and subjective bases, the "new turn toward Leninism" is understandable. It is not at all a stupid or implausible response. It is nonetheless mistaken. The political assumptions of the new Leninist deny a huge amount of insight and experience in the new left as well, much of that which was most vital and exciting. It is the flip side of the excessively student-centered radicalism of the sixties. Those who remained political adopted a kind of "ascetic" approach to politics that at its most developed is a caricature of third-world revolution. Political activity seemed to be viewed as *necessarily* self-denying and painful (for many, political activity becomes virtually synonymous with meetings). More broadly, the new Leninists came to see themselves as alien to the American working class, actors in other people's revolution. They forgot the needs and experiences that had led them to revolutionary opposition: their realizations about the pointlessness of their future jobs, the shallowness of their relationships, the exploitation and hypocrisy involved in sexual relations, and the boredom of their schoolwork. It was such feelings, coupled with a growing horror at what American capitalism did to people around the world and with increasing sophistication about the political roots of injustice, that had led to passionate commitment in the first place. But forgetting so much of their roots, they cut themselves off from the increasingly important stratum of the working class from which they emerged, believing that the millions of college students were destined to become "educated representatives of the propertied classes," as Lenin described the college-educated stratum of his day.

Higher education has expanded rapidly in recent decades; today about half of all high school graduates go on to start college, and the proportion has been steadily rising. This expansion results from advanced capitalism's need for a more educated working class: average educational levels in most job categories, including blue-collar work, have been rising; and the jobs requiring the most education, such as teaching, social work, medicine, and scientific and technical work in industry, have been among the fastest-growing parts of the labor force.⁴⁵ But as these occupations have grown they have become proletarianized. Formerly independent professions have become routine and bureaucratized. The pay is sometimes better and the working conditions are usually less hazardous than in factory work; as Bob Dylan said, "twenty years of schooling and they put you on the day shift." But the educated white-collar worker is increasingly powerless, alienated and exhausted by work.

Moreover, the sections of the working class that don't go to college are nonetheless far different from the working class of Russia. They are literate and educated to a degree that no other working class has ever been. They are capable of, in many cases already experienced in, working in unions, community groups, and other organizations. They are imbued with a deep-seated belief in democracy. The "simple" fact of a 40-hour, rather than a 66-hour, week means that workers, while keeping their jobs, can take active, even leadership roles in a revolutionary organization.

Socialists today do think differently from most other people in the working class—they are socialists. But their consciousness is not inaccessible to others; they are not "specially privileged" human beings who have been able to learn about the facts of capitalism in a fashion different than anyone else.

They are members of the American working class, radicalized by their experiences of fighting oppression, including their own, and often inspired by the "external" example of others—the Chinese, Vietnamese, French, Italians, Chileans, South Africans.

The revolutionary commitment of those who are now socialists will develop as a part of the process of developing consciousness and movement among the masses of other working people. But there is nothing automatically self-sustaining about revolutionary commitment; one experiences constant pressures from the society to be "pragmatic" and "realistic." Moreover, as the demise of the new left demonstrated so vividly, revolutionaries are prey to the distortions of feeling and perception that pervade the broader society; indeed without a clear ideology and a method for constant self-correction and support, it is probably inevitable that they will be so corrupted, losing contact with the realities of struggle and the broader population. Thus any effective revolutionary organization must develop a highly effective method of collective criticism and support, through which people can refine their ability to think critically about political activity and themselves and simultaneously feel supported by and accountable to a group. Here we have much to learn from the Chinese experience. But we also have to develop sensitivity to the kinds of needs and processes that are uniquely part of revolution in advanced capitalist society. Moreover, the organization's structure and characteristics should facilitate collective unity and self-consciousness.

C. American class structure

WE HAVE SEEN THAT American Leninism rests on several related misunderstandings of the American class structure. A basic step in creating an alternative theory, therefore, must be the development of a more accurate class analysis.

A highly diversified working class forms the material basis for revolution in twentieth-century America. Different sectors of the class will perform essential and unique roles in an emerging bloc of forces united against capitalism. But to move toward the unity of the class, and to understand the context within which a revolutionary organization must operate, it is important to study the material and structural roots of the divisions and conflicts which now keep the class fragmented.

What is needed to understand the American class structure is an analysis of the relationships of production as they affect different parts of the population. We may begin with definitions of the capitalist class, middle class, and working class. The capitalist class consists of those people who own enough income-earning property to live without working—the "independently wealthy." Members of the middle class are those who own some income-earning property, but not enough to live on. Subject to the dictates of the market, they control their own work because they work with their own property. Perhaps the middle class should be extended to include those who technically own no property, but have some form of status that allows them to control their own work: such groups as doctors and lawyers who work for someone else (self-employed doctors and lawyers are middle class according to the classical definition), tenured professors, famous performers. But these groups are numerically insignificant (they are a small and de-

45. A readable account of how the working class has changed in response to developing capitalism is found in an article by David Cohen and Marvin Lazerson, "Education and the Labor Force," in *The Capitalist System*.

clining portion of the Census Bureau category of "technical and professional workers," for instance). The working class is everyone else, those who own no important income-earning property (notice this does not exclude people who own their own homes and cars, or small savings, stocks, or bonds). The working class thus consists of people who must work for a living, under conditions dictated by the capitalist system, and of people who are directly dependent upon those who must work.

Few statistics have been collected on the capitalist class. Curiously, few social scientists seem to survey them. We may roughly identify them as the one or two per cent of the population who own most of the corporate stocks and bonds, and collect most of the capital gains and dividends.⁴⁶

The rough statistical outlines of the middle class and working class are easy to describe.⁴⁷ The middle class has been a rapidly declining percentage of the labor force: 31 per cent in 1900, 19 per cent in 1939, 9 per cent in 1969. With the rise of big business it might be expected that the independent middle class is simply replaced by salaried managers and officials (who are technically part of the working class, but in reality normally identify with the capitalist class, and are in some cases on their way into it⁴⁸). However, managers and officials amounted to only 7 per cent of the labor force in 1969; thus only 16 per cent of the labor force was in middle-class or managerial occupations, leaving 84 per cent—five-sixths—in non-managerial working-class positions. Marx's prediction that the middle class would be eliminated, and that the population would be increasingly polarized into a capitalist class and a working class, has clearly been confirmed.

The structure of the working class has been changing as well in the twentieth century. Blue-collar workers have remained a roughly constant thirty-five to forty per cent of the labor force throughout the century; but there have been significant increases in average skill and educational levels among blue-collar workers, as the least skilled jobs have been replaced by higher-skill ones. Farm labor has been rapidly declining; today less than five per cent of the labor force works on farms. The expanding categories have been professional and technical, clerical, and service workers; in particular, the fastest-growing occupations have included such groups as teachers, nurses, other medical workers, waitresses, office workers of all types, and scientific and technical workers in industry. The economic reasons for these changes within the working class include technological advances in production, the rise of corporate and state bureaucracies, and the increasing demand for services such as health and education.

As the working class has grown in numbers, it has also grown more diverse. While the working class of 1900 was found largely in home, factory, and farm, its successor seventy years later admits of no such simple description. While the mass culture introduces an important tendency toward homogenization among the subcultures of different sectors of the class, other tendencies, such as different racial and ethnic histories, and varying educational levels, tend to differentiate sectors. With growing diversity, the possibility that organizing confined to one sector in isolation from others might lead to a total opposition to capital is increasingly remote. Only organizing efforts that attempt to link different sectors of the class on a common class basis offer opportunity for fundamental shifts toward socialist consciousness.

A model for understanding the differentiation within the

working class is provided by the New American Movement's analysis of sexism. Men and women are seen as playing complementary roles in production, carrying out different but interrelated parts of the necessary labor that the working class must perform:

These social roles and relations are rooted in the sexual division of production, a division that occurs between the home and the outside workplace. Goods and services are produced primarily by men (secondarily by women) on the outside; while the production of labor power (children and husbands), the maintenance of daily life and household services, is performed by women in the home. Social value is assigned to men's work outside the home through the payment of wages while women's work in the home is considered valueless. The sexual division of production fragments social life into "public" work life and "private" isolated home life. The relegation of the domestic to the private and valueless sphere roots the oppression of women then not primarily in the division of labor—which subordinates women to men on the job—but in the sexual division of production which forces women and the family out of public life.⁴⁹

This analysis of the relationship between the labor of housewives and that of wage-earners suggests that relations among various sections of the working class are more complex than one-dimensional differences in the degree of exploitation. Similar explanations can be suggested for other divisions within the working class: they are differences among groups that play distinct but complementary roles in production. As different productive roles require different worker characteristics and personalities, the various groups naturally develop distinct styles and cultures; prejudices and even oppression of one group by another may easily result.

Today many diverse kinds of labor are needed to keep capitalism running. In particular, two major groups not included in Marx's definition of "productive workers" must be included in the modern working class: housewives and state employees. Their labor is organized around the needs of capitalism; their lives are socially integrated with other parts of the working class. In short, there is no political sense to excluding housewives and state employees from the revolutionary class.

Moreover, both state employees and housewives perform essential labor under capitalism and their active participation in the revolutionary movement is a necessity for its success. State employees of all sorts perform the increasingly central task of organizing and maintaining civil society—communities, schools, family life—according to the needs and priorities of capital. And in the home, women are responsible for much of the terrain of "personal" and "private" life—through which children receive their earliest socialization and in which people see themselves "really living." Revolt of both sectors of the work force will politicize social life and will be essential

46. See footnote 40.

47. See Michael Reich, "The Evolution of the United States Labor Force," in *The Capitalist System*.

48. The process of absorption of top managers into the capitalist class is described in G. William Domhoff's *Who Rules America?*

49. From the "Political Perspective of the New American Movement," June 1972. The analysis of sexism in that document is based on Kathryn Johnson and Peggy Somers, "The Political Economy of Sexism." See also comments by Anne Farrar and Peggy Somers in *Socialist Revolution* 10, and the article by Mariarosa Dalla Costa in *Radical America*, vol. 6, no. 1. Zaretsky's article, cited in footnote 21, has a superb historical treatment of the family and of the increasing importance of the "personal realm" under capitalism.

in bridging the gap between the "public world" or work and politics and the private world of home and neighborhood life.

The position of wage-earning women workers, as well as that of housewives, is shaped by sexism and by capitalism's need for the productive role of women in the family. The number of women working outside the home has increased rapidly since the late 1940s, but this has only partially broken down the traditionally subordinate role of women. Many of the jobs open to women in the expanding services sector and in bureaucracies place them in roles much like that of housewife and mother: secretaries, waitresses, nurses. The availability of a labor force already socialized to supportive and submissive roles has facilitated the rapid expansion of these sectors of the economy.⁵⁰

The blue-collar industrial work force remains a substantial group, as indicated by the statistics above. Its disappearance through automation, as predicted by some of the more extravagant versions of the "new working class" theories a few years ago, is not taking place. But the fact that it is a roughly constant proportion of the labor force does not mean that it is an unchanging "core" of "pure proletarians" (or that at last we've gone "lower and deeper" enough). Skill and education levels have been changing, as noted above. Considerable cultural diversity exists within the group; even among white male industrial workers, "generation gaps" and other divisions cannot be ignored.⁵¹ In addition, two major divisions of productive roles must be noted within the goods-producing sector of the economy: the divisions between white and non-white workers, and between manual and technical workers.

Blacks still face a different labor market from whites—confined to the lowest-skill, lowest-paying blue-collar and service jobs, less likely to be promoted, "last hired and first fired," unemployed more often and for longer periods.⁵² Employers use a variety of methods to maintain the separation of black and white jobs. Blacks may be hired only for temporary or menial work, or assigned to the hottest, dirtiest, or heaviest work. This promotes racial antagonism, as white workers see themselves having something to protect against blacks—better jobs—while black workers naturally want equality. (The ruling class did not "think up" racism for this purpose; the history of racism stretches back over many centuries; the ruling class does, however, consciously or unconsciously, perpetuate racism because it is useful in preventing working-class unity.) The racial division of the working class also leads to different personality styles and cultures. The "work ethic," discipline, working hard to get ahead, etc., are far more plausible sets of values for those with long-term jobs offering even slight chances of promotion (often through artificially created hierarchies of job ranks), pay increases, and seniority benefits. For those who find themselves in dead-end or temporary jobs with no chance of acquiring seniority or advancement, the work ethic is more clearly fraudulent, and casual attitudes toward work, whether rebellious or fatalistic, are more likely to prevail.

Production has become increasingly dependent on science, not just for occasional inventions but for a steady stream of technical changes in the production process. And this has required the creation of a stratum of technical workers in industry, one of the fastest-growing parts of the working class. The separation of scientific from manual work leads on the one hand to elitism, professionalism, and mystification of knowledge, treating information as private property; on the other hand, it can lead to anti-intellectual and anti-scientific attitudes

on the part of those excluded from science. The political significance of technicians has been better understood by the Italian left than by the American. As *Il Manifesto* (an Italian left group with which we find ourselves in considerable agreement) describes it,

As these social layers are not a "remnant" of the feudal or bourgeois past but a specific product of capitalist development and represent values and needs that are essential for the revolutionary process, only a critique of science and its social roles by those who produce science and the professions allows the proletariat to go beyond a refusal of capitalist technology and organization.⁵³

Under advanced capitalism, the demand for services such as health and education has also increased. These services employ workers at a variety of levels (consider the range of occupations in a hospital), including a substantial number of highly educated workers: teachers, nurses, social workers, etc. (Doctors are the one medical occupation which represents a declining proportion of the labor force, due to the restrictions of supply caused by the AMA and medical schools). These educated service workers are a largely socially distinct group from the scientific and technical workers in industry; they share some of the same problems, such as the potential for professionalism and elitism, but have important differences as well. The contradictory aspects of the humanitarian ideology surrounding work present a major problem for service workers. On the one hand, it is based on a genuine impulse toward socially useful work, an impulse that drew many people to work in services in the first place; on the other hand, under capitalism, it will always be used to justify ever-greater exploitation of the service workers themselves ("work a little harder for the patients, dear"). Many former student radicals are now employed in service work. While this improves the chances for political action among service workers, it must not become an excuse for making social services a new "key sector."

The above list by no means exhausts the divisions within the working class. It should, however, illustrate our method of approaching these divisions, in the cases of some of the larger groups of workers. The necessary labor to produce and reproduce the capitalist economy and its labor force is fragmented

50. A summary of the contradictory changes women have experienced in the last twenty years can be found in Sara Evans Boyte's "Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Fire," a paper for the NAM socialist-feminist convention reprinted in *Woman's Bulletin* 2. In the same discussion bulletin, Judy Henderson's paper, "On Integrating the Personal and the Political," is an affirmation of women's struggle and a provocative discussion of methods of group support and criticism.

51. A good recent account of the nature and diversity of the industrial work force is found in Stan Weir, "Class Forces in the 1970s," *Radical America*, vol. 6, no. 3.

52. Recent economic research suggests that there is a structural division in the labor market, which partially explains racial discrimination in employment: the division between the "primary market" in which workers are hired for stable, long-term jobs, and the "secondary market" in which temporary labor is hired. The division does not exactly follow racial lines, but of course blacks form a higher percentage of secondary workers. The reasons for this division in the labor market are only beginning to be explored; they include such forces as the division of the economy into a core of monopolistic big businesses and a periphery of small competitive firms, and the efforts of big business to achieve stable, long-term planning in as large a sphere as possible, conflicting with the fluctuations of the market which continue to limit the spread of this stability. See "Labor Market Segmentation in American Capitalism" by David Gordon, Richard Edwards, and Michael Reich (mimeo, 1973), or *Theories of Poverty and Underdevelopment* by David Gordon. James O'Connor attempts to integrate these points in *Fiscal Crisis*, chapter 1.

53. *Il Manifesto*, Thesis 91.

into complementary, but individually incomplete, sectors. Each sector has different work relationships, and therefore different training, education, skills, personalities. Often sectors of the working class will form their own social groups, neighborhoods, and cultures, including, at times, distinct hostility to other sectors. But it is the capitalist system which organizes, directs, and coordinates their separate labors. It is the capitalist class alone which benefits from the manner in which the work and life of the American people are presently structured and divided. This is what socialists must explain in our effort to achieve class unity against the common enemy; this is the sense in which the "revolutionary alliance of all the oppressed" must be reformulated to be adequate to the present.

Different sectors of the working class will play different roles in the revolutionary process, and will enrich the revolutionary alliance with perspectives and ideas drawn both from each group's particular history of oppression and from the conscious negation of its role under capitalism. Clearly all members of the working class do not, at any particular moment, have equal potential for political action. But the question of where to organize, of which groups are possible and important to mobilize right now, must be considered more carefully, and answered less sweepingly, than is common on the left.⁵⁴ Rather than debating, for instance, whether factory workers or office workers are in general a more leading sector, it is important to examine particular factory and office situations. The same job category, "secretaries, stenographers, and typists," includes women in large impersonal typing pools with supervisors checking how fast they type, and women who have been personal secretaries to the same man for twenty years. Obviously the political potential of these two kinds of secretaries is vastly different. For a fully adequate analysis, not only the structure of the workplace, but also the family and community life and cultural background of workers, and the history of past attempts to organize, must be considered.⁵⁵

But a revolutionary alliance within advanced capitalism must rest upon an essential egalitarianism and an understanding of the common humanity of all who are oppressed. Our answer to the key sector theory is that all the major sectors of the (non-managerial) working class are interdependent and necessary parts of a revolutionary movement; though at any one time some will be more politically advanced than others, none alone is sufficient, and none is the "key" to the others. The revolutionary movement must handle "contradictions among the people" with strength and determination, but also with profound respect for the capacity of all working people to grow and change. And it must recognize that the differences in status and power within the working class are vastly overshadowed by the qualitative improvement in life for all people that a humane socialist society would inaugurate.

D. The revolutionary process

REVOLUTION IN ADVANCED capitalist society has a dual character: it combines the revolt against scarcity, against poverty and material deprivation, with the revolt against authority and alienation.⁵⁶ The relationship between the two forms of revolt has been distorted by virtually all left groups, Leninists and others; it is an essential relationship for socialists to understand.

Most of the world's population and a significant minority of the American population live in terrible poverty. Huge numbers of people are hungry, without shelter and adequate clothes. For starving, physically brutalized masses of people, the revo-

lution is first against scarcity: revolutionary commitment grows first from an understanding that socialism will offer previously unimagined abundance for themselves, their comrades, their children.⁵⁷ But much of the population of the United States, and increasingly of the other advanced capitalist countries, lives at a level of at least modest physical comfort. Even in these countries socialism will provide a more secure physical existence; but people who are already living in reasonable physical comfort will not become revolutionaries solely to end material scarcity. The women's, gay, and student movements, the intensifying struggle for worker control in industry and services, even elements of the environmental movement have begun to express visions of a qualitatively new society growing out of rebellion against coercion. André Gorz summarizes the new form of revolt succinctly: "Revolutions are made not to get more (or of course less) of what we already have, but to get something altogether different that will put an end to conditions that are felt to be unbearable."⁵⁸

Our revolution must synthesize these two strands of revolutionary motivation. It must be able to understand and unite those who are demanding work and those who are refusing work, those who are asking for housing and those who demand that housing developments be planned creatively and democratically, those who demand food and those who demand an end to psychic coercion of the mass culture to buy what they don't need. No matter how affluent the United States becomes, the revolt against scarcity will always retain an important role. Most of humanity exists within scarcity conditions, and United States imperialism profits from and perpetuates that situation. To isolate the revolution in advanced capitalism from the struggles and poverty of the third world would be to live in a chauvinist fantasy. The revolutionary process will develop only through a high degree of international understanding and solidarity; a part of the post-revolutionary work will be the use of modern technology and affluence to end poverty throughout the world. Moreover, American capitalism shows no tendency toward eliminating all internal poverty. Indeed, it may be useful to the system to preserve it, especially in an ethnically or racially distinct minority, which can be channeled into the worst jobs, used as a scapegoat for other workers' hostilities, and as evidence that the majority of workers are, in fact, better off than someone. (Northern European capitalism, finding itself without any blacks to play this role, has imported temporary labor from southern Europe, which tends to confirm the idea that capitalism has a structural need for such a group.) Finally, even the "mainstream" of the working class has no

54. For a helpful approach to this question, and a valid critique of NAM's frequent reluctance to discuss the political potential of different groups of workers, see Randy Bregman, Tom Kuna, and Nancy Lee, "Organizing among Teachers," NAM Discussion Bulletin 4.

55. An excellent example of such an analysis, for a different time and place, is E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*. What the American left needs is a specific understanding of the various parts of the working class on the concrete level of Thompson's analysis, not sweeping generalizations—and dismissals—of major groups of workers.

56. See Andrew Feenberg, "Marxist Theory and Socialist Society: A Dilemma" for an intriguing and provocative discussion of the two dimensions to revolution and their importance in differing situations (in *Newsletter on Comparative Studies of Communism*, vol. 6, no. 3).

57. The great Leninist parties in the underdeveloped countries combined the struggle for material well-being with a vision of the new society to be built collectively. Yet the leading aspect in such revolutions was necessarily a revolt against poverty.

58. *Socialism and Revolution*.

guarantee that its modest comfort will be uninterrupted; inflation, food and fuel shortages, unemployment, and incredible waste are constantly imposed on it by the marvelous workings of the "market system."

But while keeping in mind the continuing importance of the revolt against material deprivation, it is also important to be aware of the rising role of the revolt against coercion, which is of course related. Whatever the level of material affluence, capitalism organizes all social life in accordance with its values and priorities: efficiency, rationality, profit maximization. With advancing capitalism, whole sectors of the class develop new needs and hopes that capitalism is unable to satisfy—for community, for personal expression and self-discovery, for creative work that serves other people, for directness and honesty, for nonexploitative sexual relations, for new, non-instrumental relationships with nature. It is this complex of needs that forms the basis for what we call the revolt against authority. On the average, real incomes have increased dramatically over the past generation; most American workers are well aware that they are living in greater physical comfort than their parents did. They will not be impressed if we try to deny this. It is true that a socialist system could have produced more comfort with the same resources; under capitalism growth is accompanied by urban sprawl, disintegration of the central cities, pollution, and twenty varieties of toothpaste. However all this only slows—it does not reverse—the trend toward rising affluence.

Rising affluence does not end capitalist oppression; it only changes its forms. And the struggle against that oppression goes on as a struggle against all forms of authoritarianism and coercion, toward a vision of "free conscious activity." Marx described that vision as resting upon the possibilities that emerge only in an advanced economy:

The realm of freedom only begins, in fact, where that labor which is determined by need and external purposes, ceases. . . . Freedom in this field cannot consist of anything else but the fact that socialized mankind, the associated producers, regulate their interchange with Nature rationally . . . accomplish their task with the least expenditure of energy. . . . Nevertheless, this always remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human potentiality for its own sake, the true realm of freedom.⁵⁹

We do not expect an abrupt transition from revolt against scarcity to revolt against authority. There is no particular income level at which a family puts aside the concerns of poverty and enters a realm of post-scarcity anti-authoritarianism. Often one group of workers, even one person, resists both material and cultural oppression at once; often both are combined in one struggle. But in a long period of rising affluence, the relative importance of the struggle against authority necessarily increases. There is no longer any possibility of "deciding" which kind of revolution to have; we must have both together. Capitalism in the United States, and very likely in Europe and Japan, has passed a watershed of sorts; it has attained sufficient material prosperity for a majority of the working class that the revolution can no longer be based solely on rebellion against material deprivation.

The duality of the revolutionary process has rarely been understood by the left in this country. Most leftists have simply, unambiguously, grasped one or the other horn of the dilemma, sometimes even switching back and forth in response

to past failures. On the one hand, the exclusive importance of the revolt against forms of authority has been proclaimed by "cultural revolutionaries," anarchists, and certain of the most self-centered and self-indulgent parts of the student, women's, and gay movements. At its worst, this leads to an insensitivity to the needs of other oppressed groups that can border on class prejudice and racism.

On the other hand, American Leninists often commit the opposite error, insisting on the exclusive importance of the struggle against hunger and material deprivation. It is not surprising that this is the result of indiscriminate adoption of Lenin's strategy and tactics; Lenin developed his ideas in leading a revolution that was primarily (though not entirely) a revolt against hunger and poverty. But the simple mimicking of Lenin has done considerable damage to the development of a revolutionary movement in the United States. For when those who are struggling against coercion and capitalist-formed repressions confront Leninists, they are often told that their concerns are "middle-class luxuries," distractions from the "real" struggle.⁶⁰ This produces some guilty converts to Leninism, who renounce their experience as irrelevant; more often it produces discouraged movement dropouts, who renounce revolutionary politics. American Leninists see criticism of the work ethic and attempts to form new social relationships as luxuries. The priority that they place upon the revolt against scarcity has led them to champion the social and sexual repressions that Western capitalism employed, and the Soviet Union emulated, in order to promote industrialization. Both the Communist Party and the Revolutionary Union condemn homosexuality and deviations from the nuclear family. American Leninists' underestimation of cultural forms of oppression makes it difficult for them to deal adequately with the personal, subjective aspects of working-class division, such as the psychosocial side of racism and sexism. This failure makes it difficult for Leninists to understand the revolt against the repressions and self-denials that capitalism demands.

The errors of American Leninism stem from two sources. First, Leninist groups assume that state repression is the primary instrument of ruling-class domination. We have argued that that is the case in many autocratic third-world countries, where foreign imperialism tied to domestic ruling classes has undermined the ruling classes' legitimacy. The situation is far different in the United States. Here the ruling class rules first through "consent" and acquiescence, through the contradictory and confused ideas people have internalized. The revolutionary movement must clarify class relationships in this country and build a revolutionary culture through struggle against the bourgeois order. Secondly, Leninists minimize the role of white-collar, service, technical, and household workers in a revolutionary movement, and disregard the increasingly important "revolt against authority" which emanates from many sections of the working class.

59. *Capital*, vol. 3, p. 820.

60. Leninists in the third world are far more sensitive to the "subjective." Mao, for instance, described the party's approach to the masses' values and beliefs in these terms: "It often happens that objectively the masses need a certain change, but subjectively they are not yet conscious of the need. . . . In such cases, we should wait patiently. We should not make the change until, through our work, most of the masses have become conscious of the need and are willing and determined to carry it out. . . . There are two principles here: one is the actual need of the masses rather than what we fancy they need, and the other is the wishes of the masses, who must make up their minds instead of our making up their minds for them." *Selected Works*, vol. 3.

Because of these errors, Leninist parties, despite their undeniable hard work and dedication, will be unable to unify the American working class and lead a socialist revolution in the United States. The new circumstances of advanced capitalism require new strategies and new forms of organization.

IV

IN THIS SECTION, we outline the kind of revolutionary organization we need for the present-day United States. The nature of this organization will grow both from an understanding of the revolutionary process in advanced capitalism and from the nature of the socialist society that the revolution will inaugurate.

The organization we are describing will not grow out of thin air. Nor are we waiting for it to do so; we are both active in the New American Movement. But clearly what we are describing is a much larger, more powerful organization than NAM is at present; it is what we hope will grow out of our work in NAM, either through the development of NAM alone or through mergers with other groups. We urge individuals and local groups who agree with this paper to join NAM.

There are important aspects of Lenin's thought which our organization should adopt, as we argued in section II. Above all, we need the revolutionary determination of Lenin, the conviction that socialism is a possibility and that what we do makes a difference in making it a reality. We reject economism. We recognize the role of state power as the ultimate defender of capitalism. As in Lenin's day, the revolutionary movement must be based on an alliance of all oppressed groups; in creating that alliance, the problems of racism, nationalism, and imperialism are crucial ones to face.

But, as we argued in section III, there are important ways in which our organization should differ from American Leninism. We do not need a secret, hierarchical party preparing to engage in military struggle. Rather, we must win far greater open political support and participation; for that we need a publicly democratic organization, one that understands the nature of American capitalism, how it rules more immediately through ideology than through force. We reject narrow stereotypes of the working class and its problems: revolutionaries are members of the same class as the "masses," facing the same day-to-day problems, but with a specific view of how to overcome those problems. We need to understand the diversity of the American working class, and thus understand the importance both of reaching out to other strata who are not much in the movement yet, and of respecting the role of, and expanding our base among, those strata in which we are currently strongest. Finally, we must remember the dual nature of the revolutionary process: the revolt against scarcity and the revolt against authority must be combined, rather than opposed, to create revolution in the United States.

Our description of the revolutionary organization is intimately connected to our vision of the future socialist society. To create an authentically democratic society, which values the free development of each individual as well as of the social whole, the socialist organization and movement must come to embody and reflect such goals.

We envision a socialist society which is democratic in every sphere of life.⁶¹ It will be based in workplace and neighborhood councils, which will combine into larger bodies for metropolitan, regional, and national government functions. To main-

tain direct democracy, and control over policy by those it affects, decisions will be made as locally as possible. For some areas, such as housing and child care, this means very decentralized local planning; for others, such as transportation and energy production, metropolitan and national planning will be essential. It is not a question of drawing up blueprints in advance, but of establishing the general principles. Many years of experimentation will doubtless be required to determine the optimum level of decentralization of different functions.

Eliminating inequality will be a major goal of a socialist society: there will be an immediate floor and ceiling on incomes, to end the extremes of inequality at once; and the society will move beyond that, toward increasing equality, perhaps by making more and more things free rather than by equalizing money incomes. The commitment to equality does not, however, mean that the revolution will expropriate the personal possessions of middle-income people; its primary purpose is to unite the people in expropriating the means of production, the enormous productive wealth and power of corporate America. Private control of the means of production is the most important source of inequality today; eliminating it is far more urgent than the final, perfect equalization of incomes within the working class.⁶²

Socialism will be based on respect for the equal worth and integrity of each individual; it will allow the creation of non-sexist, non-racist, egalitarian relationships, by eliminating the material basis of sexism, racism, and hierarchy. It will respect the freedom of belief and of social experimentation of individuals and small groups, so long as they do not hurt others. The major obligation which will be imposed on individuals will be to share the socially necessary unpleasant work; but when the vast amounts of wasteful and harmful activity presently existing in the United States economy are stopped, the necessary work will probably be well below forty hours a week. Furthermore, necessary work will decline over time, as the new meaning and possibilities of socialism in an already industrialized country are realized: the goal of socialism will not be to work hard to accumulate and industrialize, as in past socialist revolutions, but rather to reduce the necessary work involved in maintaining the society, to create the realm of "free conscious activity," uncoerced by economic need.

There will continually be difficult decisions to make. The nature of the society's responsibility to formerly oppressed minorities, and to third-world countries, will not be easy to define and agree on. New forms of democracy will have to be created: for instance, how can workers' and consumers' interests be balanced in running industry? How can democratic access to mass media be assured? But there will be more inter-

61. The phrase "dictatorship of the proletariat" conveys the exact opposite of our vision of socialism, and is one of the least helpful parts of Marxist jargon as it has developed on the left. Whatever elaborate rationales may be presented for the phrase, it will always suggest to people outside the left that we are advocating the worst, most dictatorial features of socialist countries, such as Stalinism in Russia. (See Paul Breines's review of *The Essential Stalin* in *Telos* 15 for an insightful analysis of Stalin and his renewed popularity on the left.)

62. In *Fanshen* William Hinton explains how the Chinese Communists learned that promoting immediate, total equality within villages misdirected the anger of poor peasants toward the middle peasants who were just slightly better off, rather than uniting both against the real enemies, the biggest landlords, the generals, and the Kuomintang. There is a lesson for the American left to learn from this. People with incomes between, say, \$15,000 and \$30,000 are not the ruling class; we should avoid misdirecting our attack at them and their living standards.

est in political participation than at present, because it will be more possible to affect the decisions that are made—apathy today is often a rational response to powerlessness.

The tasks of the revolutionary organization are defined by this vision of the socialist society, and by the nature of the revolutionary process that will lead to socialism. There are four major functions of the revolutionary organization: popular mobilization; creation of a "culture of resistance"; advocacy of a socialist vision and strategy; and, eventually, contesting for state power and transforming the state.⁶³

In the first instance, the revolutionary organization must assist the self-organization of the working class in workplaces, communities, schools, and other settings. It does so to create a network of popular institutions, free of ruling-class control, that will provide the basis for the revolutionary movement, and will become the direct organs of democracy in the future socialist society. The essential feature of such popular institutions, in addition to internal democracy, is that they go beyond a defensive role, beginning to take the offensive against capitalism. This means challenging capitalist authority in new ways, questioning hitherto sacred budgetary and administrative priorities, rejecting the established notions of what constitutes a "responsible" organization and "reasonable" demands. The conditions we need to live and work "reasonably" often strike capitalism as entirely unreasonable. It is this perspective, above all, that we should bring to our organizing efforts.

Though we convey arrogance toward capitalism, we must avoid it toward other workers. Organizing does not consist of "expert" organizers, armed with this paper or any other theoretical work, coming in and laying a structure on people. Socialists must be sensitive to the needs and feelings of people around them, not imposing any preconceptions about which aspects of capitalist oppression "should" be most important. To understand other people we must understand ourselves, not as "outside cadre" but as people with the same kinds of lives and problems as those we would "organize." On doing this we make a discovery that at first might seem to have little to do with our political analysis: we need the support of the people around us, in countless little ways, to survive—advice from other workers in learning the informal, as well as the formal, rules at work; cooperation in covering up for each other in the face of the boss; help when our cars break down, in arranging child care, and so on.

This is not an accidental or unstructured process. Recent research suggests that the working class constantly self-organizes into informal defensive groups to fight back against capitalist power. In the workplace, studies have revealed the functions of informal work groups that limit production and maintain some control over the work process:

There is ample evidence . . . to suggest strongly that the discipline of informal work groups has a major effect in day-to-day relations on the shop floor. . . . From the standpoint of the worker, the control by the work group of production is closely bound up with wage stability, job security, working conditions, social interaction, work satisfaction, relation to management, and even psychological satisfaction.⁶⁴

It turns out that even union organization, often taken by leftists as the paradigm of mass activity, must, if it is to be successful, be based on a confederation of pre-existing informal work groups. The task of socialist organizers in informal work groups is twofold: to help make their functioning and existence the object of conscious understanding and direction by working

people themselves, and to help different "cellular" groups to combine and coordinate their activities. Organizations and struggles we attempt to build, in the workplace or elsewhere, must grow out of existing informal social group structures, or rapidly create new ones, if they are to succeed.

In workplace organizing we must face the question of the relationship of socialists to unions. Unfortunately there is no simple answer. Unions are defensive organizations of workers, protecting wages, hours, and sometimes conditions of work. As such, all but the most corrupt and self-interested of unions deserve our support. On the other hand, the position of unions, as defensive, non-revolutionary organizations, compels them to play a conservative role, disciplining their members to work once a contract is signed, suppressing other issues in order to gain bigger wage settlements. (In addition to the intrinsic pressure of the situation, of course, the conscious efforts of many union leaders steer unions in a conservative direction, but it would be a mistake to pose the issue simply as one of "misleadership.") Thus there will be situations in which it is appropriate to work directly in unions, and even more often in rank-and-file caucuses within unions; but this cannot be a complete program for workplace activity, even in those workplaces that have unions. There is no direct or natural transition from the defensive, "responsible" posture of unions, even unions with honest leaders, to the offensive against capitalism which workers' councils must take. We should create our own organizations, separate from the necessarily bureaucratized and government-regulated structures of unions; and we should remain open to issues and struggles outside of those that unions can raise.

Similar problems emerge in the question of socialist electoral campaigns. The advocates of a socialist electoral strategy in NAM have effectively described the growing role of the state in economic and social life, and have urged electoral and other challenges to state policies which serve the ruling class. Electoral activity, however, even more than union work, has built-in pressures toward reformism and can, moreover, foster illusion about a purely electoral route to socialism. Socialist electoral activity should be seen as a tactic that can at times aid the popular, non-electoral movement. To overcome the reformist pressures of electoral involvement, any elected socialist officials must be directly accountable to non-electoral mass organizations.

The primary goal of the revolutionary organization at present must be building a movement—a network of autonomous working-class institutions. The movement never grows strictly within capitalist institutions, whether workplaces, schools, or the electoral system; it never accepts as "given" the ways in which social reality is divided and structured by capitalism. The movement is always a hybrid: its units exist partially within institutions, but also have ties across and outside of institutional boundaries. The movement grows through forms of association that people can claim as "their own," within which new consciousness and new forms of relationship can develop, leadership can emerge, people can compare and organize their experiences, past histories of struggle can be unearthed. In a classic study of the formation of working-class consciousness

63. For similar attempts to outline the functions of a revolutionary organization, see André Gorz, *Socialism and Revolution*, pp. 53-69, and the paper by Miles Mogelescu in NAM Discussion Bulletin 3.

64. M. Guttman, "Primary Work Groups," *Radical America*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 81-83. More information on this will be published soon in an anthology edited by Paul Rosenstein and Stan Weir.

in a different era, E. P. Thompson points to the importance of independent "people's institutions":

The countryside was ruled by the gentry, the towns by corrupt corporations, the nation by the corruptest corporation of all; but the chapel, the tavern, and the home were their own. In the "unsteeped" places of worship there was room for a free intellectual life and for democratic experiments.⁶⁵

This is the environment we must create, not in a dreamy, isolated "counterculture," but within the process of political struggle.

Despite the generally bleak atmosphere on the left recently, some promising beginnings have been made toward defining "new forms of struggle." Strike support and boycott coalitions have been some of the most widespread and durable forms created by the left: support for the Shell, Farah, and United Farm Workers strikes has been a major activity of NAM chapters, and other left groups, in the past year.⁶⁶ In Minneapolis, NAM played a leading role in a coalition of left- and right-wing groups, which defeated the joint efforts of the Democratic and Republican parties and the downtown businessmen to build a huge domed stadium, and went on to force an amendment to the city charter requiring a referendum on any major bond issues by the city in the future.⁶⁷ And in several other cities, new mass organizations have developed, uniting different constituencies, in some cases integrating workplace and community movements.⁶⁸ Finally, the socialist electoral campaign of 1973 in San Francisco, undertaken by NAM and other groups, is built on concrete ties to different community and workplace struggles and sees itself as aiding those struggles by contesting ruling-class policies; such ties may be able to overcome the problems inherent in electoral work—much practical experience will be required to evaluate the results.⁶⁹ None of these are perfect models for socialist organizing; but, examined critically, they nonetheless suggest exciting possibilities for mass mobilization in the mid-1970s.

The tasks of mobilizing and organizing popular groups and struggles suggest certain specific features of the revolutionary organization: although it encourages and allows a diversity of forms, its basic organizing unit will be the working collective, based in communities and workplaces. As the revolutionary organization grows in an area, networks will have to be created to coordinate and link particular groups' work. Such collectives will be open and democratic; moreover they will not demand "total commitment" and "self-sacrifice": they will respect the complex and varied needs of their members, for time to themselves, and for a variety of activity, for play. But the groups will be highly self-conscious and politicized; they will continually analyze concrete situations and examine broad questions of strategy and theory. And they will themselves fulfill many of the members' needs for social life and creative work.

A second function of the revolutionary organization is participation in the creation of a "culture of resistance." A movement cannot survive through formal politics alone; to endure and grow it must become a way of life, encompassing new forms of social life, entertainment, and communication, and creating counter-institutions and service projects—food co-ops, free clinics, etc.—in those areas of life where they are possible. (It is in the nature of capitalism that alternative steel mills and city governments are not possible; thus a purely counter-institutional strategy for change is doomed to failure.)

The cultural and practical needs of movement-building suggest that the revolutionary organization will also need to develop and support a wide range of organizing, research, cultural, and artistic centers.

One of the most creative aspects of the new left was its concern with "culture" and with the contradictions of social life under capitalism. The efforts of the new left to build counter-institutions began to tap the explosive needs people have to get out of isolated homes, meet people, and participate directly in social activities (the songs of the sixties are full of startling and haunting laments about lost community, loneliness, isolation—with occasional notes of optimism: "There'll be dancing in the streets"). And the new left began to develop a counter-vision of human culture to correspond to the counter-institutions: the vision of an egalitarian and free community in which masses of people from different backgrounds can participate and express themselves.

Yet the new left lacked a clear vision of a society in which such a revolutionary culture could be sustained; it lacked a strategy for relating culture to class struggle, in a way that could involve the non-young, non-student sectors of the working class. Eventually politics and culture diverged even within the "youth revolt": as new left politics became more exotically militant and self-isolating, the counterculture became elitist and commercialized. Promising instant liberation, the counterculture in fact reproduced the racial, sexual, and hierarchical contradictions in the broader society.

A successful resistance culture must be more directly tied to a political movement, and political consciousness, than was the counterculture of the late 1960s. Examples of such a political culture can be seen in the civil rights movement of the early 1960s, in the labor movement of the 1930s, and above all in the IWW. One indicator of the role of culture in these movements was their singing, often an effective form of propagandizing as well as a source of collective encouragement: in 1914 an academic survey found that half of the migrant workers in California "knew in a rough way the—for them curiously attractive—philosophy of the I.W.W. and could also sing some of its songs."⁷⁰ By contrast, the widespread inability of American leftists today to sing anything more than half-remembered commercial rock songs shows how far the passive consumer culture of capitalism has impoverished us, and how badly we

65. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*.

66. See the article in the NAM newspaper, May 1973, on the Shell strike, the wide variety of issues raised by the strike, and the role of New Orleans NAM in a local strike support coalition. Staughton Lynd's article in the NAM Discussion Bulletin, no. 1, describes an interesting example of a worker-community coalition that integrates environmental and occupational health issues with strike support.

67. See the NAM newspaper, April 1973, and NAM's Discussion Bulletin 3 and 4.

68. It appears to be increasingly possible to build mass organizations that bridge workplace-community gaps and unite different constituencies; for different models of mass organizing—none exactly like that we are proposing, which includes a specific and open socialist presence from the beginning, but all of which indicate the increasing opportunities for organizing—see George Lipsitz, "Beyond the Fringe Benefits," *Liberation*, July 1973; Derek Shearer, "CAP: New Breeze in the Windy City," *Ramparts*, vol. 12, no. 3; R. Krickus, "Organizing Neighborhoods: Gary and Newark," *Dissent*, Winter 1972. For related experiences and strategies around workers' control, see John Case et al., *Workers Control: A Reader*; see also *Radical America*, vol. 7, no. 2, for a collection on community-workplace struggles in Italy.

69. See issues 1 and 2 of *Common Sense*, the newspaper of the San Francisco Socialist Coalition.

70. Quoted in Joyce Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices* (emphasis added).

need an active culture of working-class resistance.

Such a culture would also have important implications for the internal life of the revolutionary organization. Within the organization there will be a constant struggle to transcend racist, sexist, and elitist behavior. But the terms of that struggle must be far different from the practice of the new left. The organization must understand the different ways people express their feelings and ideas—not simply, as college-educated people sometimes expect, through intellectual and verbal means. Fundamentally, the organization must not constantly condemn and judge people harshly; it must create an environment that profoundly values and supports its members, and gives recognition and reinforcement to attempts to change.

A third function of the revolutionary organization is constant advocacy of a socialist vision and strategy. Whenever socialists play an important role in mass organizations, they should be publicly explicit about their ideas and political perspectives. This is a major difference between our approach and that of many left groups which see themselves as a secret cadre working in mass organizations or front groups: too often the cadre keeps its political views on all but the simplest issues a secret from the masses, seeking to recruit individuals into the cadre, but not to encourage, or even to allow, the development of radical politics in the mass organization. The Communist Party's role in unions after 1934, and the Socialist Workers Party's role in the anti-war movement in recent years, are classic examples of this approach. Unlike the "secret cadre" style of these and similar examples, we should not try to work our way into leadership positions as "honest militants" without revealing our political views. When we play leadership roles in working-class organizations, they must be based on mass understanding and acceptance of our ideas, not just on personal trust. This is the only way to avoid the sense of betrayal people would feel on finding out they have been "infiltrated" by socialists; and it is also the only way to combat the immense institutional pressures on all leaders to be "responsible" and compromising reformists.

Clearly, being "publicly socialist" must be more than announcing a religious conviction. Equally clearly, it must usually mean less than demanding that mass organizations themselves become socialist. The role of socialists in mass organizations should be to advocate strategies which create class polarization, and thereby develop a basis for socialist consciousness throughout the organization. Two questions are at the heart of such strategies: who will pay for proposed reforms, and who will make the decisions about their nature and implementation. (The questions correspond loosely to the two strands of revolutionary motivation discussed earlier.)

The new left most often failed to ask the first question clearly. But it is essential if we are to rebuild the left on more solid grounds. Rather than participating in struggles, for instance, in which middle-income taxpayers are asked to pay for increases in welfare payments, or white workers are asked to give up their jobs for blacks, socialists must argue for struggles that demand that reforms be paid for by the ruling class.

The new left was more accurate in its insistence upon the question of control. Yet it failed to press the issue beyond demands for popular control of particular institutions or vaguely defined communities. It is important to move beyond the formulations of "community control" of the 1960s, to find methods for demanding that power be shifted to alliances representing diverse sections of the working class.

The need for advocacy of socialism also affects the internal life of the revolutionary organization. The organization's internal functioning should be, and will inevitably be considered by others as, a "preview" of the kind of socialist democracy we want to create. Thus the organization must be thoroughly, openly democratic at every level, with its internal life and debates open to public view. However, this is not meant to endorse the anti-leadership and anti-structure views which are popular among many independent leftists. Important issues must be decided in reasonable lengths of time, by votes if necessary; once decisions are reached there must be strong elected leadership with the authority to carry out the group's will.

The principles of internal organization are fixed, but the forms are not. The organization allows complete autonomy in the formation of subgroups around particular issues, geographical areas, or types of oppression. Aware of the continuing problems of divisions and antagonisms within the working class, even among those committed to overcoming them, the organization allows all-women, all-black, etc., chapters and caucuses. Similarly, quotas may be established for racial and sexual balance in leadership.

The revolutionary organization requires discipline (more, for instance, than NAM has had in the past); but, as Rosa Luxemburg put it, it must not be a "regulated docility" but rather "the self-discipline and organization of a class struggling for its emancipation." Ultimately the discipline, the unity, the internal democracy that the organization needs cannot come from structure alone. They grow from a shared commitment, from a constant, organic growth in perspective and understanding, from a deep collective trust and respect which permeates the organization, even as it grows in size. Such a collective life must grow from the basic assumptions of the organization, from its warmth, its boldness, its honesty, from its emphasis on the importance and dignity of each member. This is not an alternative to, not a different emphasis from, the political struggle. For it is only among people engaged in common struggle that the beginnings of socialist relationships can be created.

The mutual trust and self-discipline will be all the more crucial when it comes to the fourth function of the revolutionary organization, taking state power and transforming the state into a true socialist democracy. This will involve at some point a qualitative change in the nature of the organization, for the ruling class will not simply surrender without a fight. But, as explained in section III, this situation is sufficiently far off that it is counterproductive to begin structural preparations for it now. Moreover, how a transfer of power to the working class will occur is a complex question. For instance, a socialist electoral victory may very well legitimize the primarily non-electoral transfer of power to workers' councils, as proponents of an "electoral strategy" within NAM have argued. On the other hand, an over-reliance on an electoral strategy and the "neutrality" of the state, and an under-reliance on popular mobilization, fatally crippled the victory of the Popular Unity coalition in Chile.⁷¹

To most people the growth of a powerful, many-faceted socialist organization and a massive popular movement for socialism seem like an impossible fantasy. Furthermore, the break-up

71. A remarkably prescient discussion of the situation in Chile, written before the coup, can be found in Kyle Steenland, "Chile at the Crossroads," *New Left Review* 78 and *Socialist Revolution* 15.

of the new left caused many activists to feel disillusioned and uncertain. Finally, the turn toward Leninism starting in the late 1960s enclosed some remnants of the left in a political language that is ineffective and inappropriate to an advanced capitalist environment (despite the good will and determination of its proponents).

Yet objective conditions and new developments within the left give great cause for hope. The empire is shaken by internal crises and defeat abroad. Massive numbers of people are open to new directions; conventional liberalism is exhausted. And the socialist vision itself is a force of enormous potential power, a vision that can shatter the imaginative bonds of capitalism and help give meaning and substance to our future. We can, today, build a revolutionary organization and a popular movement that will begin realizing the immense possibility for socialism in the United States. □