

INTRODUCTION

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

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 Thus, even in its original and outdated form the critical section of the pamphlet can, we hope, be useful.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WEAKNESSES OF THE CURRENT DEBATE

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and its other problems.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CRISIS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CURRENT STRATEGIC APPROACHES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE C.P. STRATEGY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

of 'narrowing' the struggle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The American workers go along with this whole system, not in the first place because they are intoxicated with the ideas of anti-communism. They go along with it because it has been capable of delivering the goods to them over the last 30 years. The system has been capable of giving them higher wages and a higher degree of social security. It is this fact which has determined social stability. Once the system becomes less able to deliver the goods, a completely new situation will occur in the U.S.

Trade union consciousness is not only negative. Or to formulate this more dialectically, trade-union consciousness, in and by itself, is socially neutral. It is neither reactionary nor revolutionary. It becomes reactionary when the system is capable of satisfying trade union demands.)It creates a major revolutionary potential once the system is no longer capable of satisfying basic trade union demands. Such a transformation of American society under the impact of the international competition of capital is today knocking at the door of U.S. capitalism.

As long as socialism and revolution are only ideals preached by militants because of their own convictions and consciousness, their social impact is inevitably limited. But when the ideas of revolutionary socialism are able to unite faith, confidence, and consciousness with the immediate material interest of a social class in revolt - the working class, then their potential becomes literally explosive." (Ernest Mandel, WHERE IS AMERICA GOING?, page 15.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mandel is putting forth the traditional Trotskyist variation of

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

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

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

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

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

Depending on the conditions, the struggle for immediate needs

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

PARTY BUILDERS

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

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

We think that the development of a Marxist-Leninist program (a basic political program which understands the contradictions in the U.S. society, which clearly defines the aim or direction in which the society is inevitably going, and a strategy for revolution - a plan of action) is the principle task of Marxist-Leninists in the United States. This is the work to which we should devote our major efforts...

On the other hand, this cannot be separated from the practical aspects of building a party - even though our practical tasks must assume a secondary nature...The main aspect of our practice should be directed towards establishing links with the most advanced sectors of the working class. These advanced proletarians are open to grasping Marxism-Leninism and becoming communist vanguard fighters...The secondary aspect of practical activity at this time is the task of communists to lead mass struggle and educate the masses of workers. (Georgia Communist League, THE VANGUARD PARTY, page 9.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SUMMARY OF OTHER APPROACHES

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

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

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

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

AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY

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

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

Most Marxists, including most of those we have been criticizing agree that the struggle for socialism must be developed out of the spontaneous attempt of the working class to resist or alleviate capitalist exploitation and oppression. As was said earlier, mass consciousness of the necessity and possibility of a socialist revolution and a socialist society must be built on this base of struggle through

the intervention of a disciplined Leninist party with a definite political program. The question is not where to begin, but how to proceed — not whether the party should intervene in the mass struggle, but how it should intervene.

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

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

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

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

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

THREE ASPECTS OF THE REFORM STRUGGLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

capitalism.

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

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

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

'UPPING THE ANTE'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TWO CONCEPTIONS OF THE WORLD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The break with the routine of working class life which takes

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

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

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

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

With the prisoner released, the Mayor saw an opportunity to

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

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

DUAL POWER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE PARTY

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

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

DISCIPLINE AND CENTRALISM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PARTY AND CLASS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

lems which those masses pose by their practical activity, in this way constitute a cultural and social bloc. (Gramsci, *THE MODERN PRINCE*, page 26. In this selection 'intellectuals' refers to the party.)

(The goal is)...to raise the intellectual level of ever-widening strata of the people, giving personality to the amorphous elements of the masses, which means working to produce cadres of intellectuals of a new type who arise directly from the masses though remaining in contact with them. Gramsci, *THE MODERN PRINCE*, page 73)

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

MARXISM AND SCIENCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A CONTRADICTION

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

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

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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