

## For A REVOLUTIONARY CADRE ORGANIZATION BASED IN THE WORKING CLASS

Joel Geier

### I

When the Berkeley Independent Socialist Club was formed in 1964 serious discussions were held on the nature of the organization we were forming, its tasks and perspectives, and the organizational conclusions that followed from that. In the intervening years we successfully met some of the new opportunities which were opened to us, and radically altered the conceptions that we held in 1964. However, that was always done piecemeal and pragmatically, in response to concrete situations. Often new organizational demands were placed upon our original conceptions - which could not bear the weight of them and broke down - but which were not replaced by another set of systematic ideas on the nature of the IS. The result is that today there is both vagueness, and sharply contradictory ideas in our ranks, on what we are attempting to accomplish organizationally. That, plus the changes in the famous "objective conditions", and in our own organization requires a thorough going rediscussion of organizational questions.

### II

The nature of socialist organization is a political, not an administrative or narrowly conceived "organizational" question. The sort of organization a tendency builds is a function of its politics, a reflection of its goals and perspectives. In the revolutionary movement there is practically no other question which has been raised so often, in the attempt to find the precise organizational vehicle to serve the revolutionary goals we hold. For our tendency the central methodology used when approaching the "organizational question" has been to find and develop an organizational form which can be an instrument for revolutionary democratic socialism - an effective tool to serve our ends of a mass revolution from below and workers democracy -, which fits our conception of the political period we are in, and our tasks including our organizational tasks in that period, and is calibrated to the real stage of development of our own organization.

A brief look at other forms of organization shows that for other political tendencies as well, organization is primarily a reflection of their political ends. To briefly cite a few:

1. Liberal Organizations. One of the indexes of the character of American liberalism is the fact that it has been unable to organize a permanent, mass membership organization and has usually grouped itself on an elitist basis around personalities or "letterhead" organizations. Common Cause and Nader's Raiders are only recent examples of this theme. Liberal organizational form is the counterpart of liberal acceptance of this social system, and an emphasis on eradicating felt evils by placing better individuals in power.
2. Social democratic organizations. The typical social democratic organization is loose and amorphous, allowing for the greatest diversity of political views and an absence of discipline. This is usually only a camouflage for the fact that the leadership is a bureaucratic clique which makes the decisions for what are essentially electoral machines. Its conceptions of socialism from above, parliamentary reformism, makes its appeal essentially to a passive electoral basis, not a self-emancipating working class. In reality the social democratic parties accept capitalism and conceive

of themselves as a pressure group in capitalist society based on the trade union bureaucracy and the labor aristocracy. As a result social democratic organizations even of the left variety, never organize fractions in the unions to overthrow the bureaucracy. Lack of discipline is no handicap for these parties that do not have revolutionary goals. In the American Socialist Party the absence of discipline meant that no matter what position the Party took, its public spokesman Norman Thomas was always free to present his own views, which in the public mind was seen as the SP view, even if it was the total opposite. The broadness of social democratic organization can only exist on the basis of reformism. Whenever a serious revolutionary tendency has developed in a social democratic party it has always been expelled - without exception by bureaucratic and anti-democratic means by these upholders of bourgeois "democracy".

3. Stalinist parties. After 15 years of "de-stalinization" and "polycentrism" they still continue to be totalitarian parties controlled by apparatchniks. No matter what the rank and file wants, even when it gets militant and revolutionary minded as in France and Italy, the politics of the apparatus, which is the real party, prevails. While the apparatus must tactically take into account rank and file sentiment, it is essentially independent of the ranks. The Stalinist parties are embryonic reflections of Stalinist society, in which the bureaucratic apparatus raises itself to an independent autonomous existence as a class ruling over society.

4. The SWP. Although it gives lip service to workers democracy, calls for the right of free discussion and oppositional tendencies in socialist society, it is always quick to snuff out with surgical means any serious opposition which develops in its own rank. Its concept of a monolithic party leads it to treat its own internal critics as traitors, and has led to at least 10 significant splits in its brief history. Workers democracy is a nice but not necessary condition for a workers state, the SWP holds, and the same is true of its internal regime. It is a party which ~~reflects the~~ politically reflects the degeneration of the Russian revolution, and organizationally reflects the monolithism of the Zinoviev Comintern in the period of its degeneration.

The organizational form that most of us believe represent the vehicle for proletarian revolution and workers democracy is that of the revolutionary party, based on the model of Bolshevik and early Communist parties. This was proven not just by the success of the Russian revolution, but unfortunately by a long series of defeats. Germany in 1918, Austria 1918, Hungary 1919, Italy 1920, Spain in the 30s, etc. Since WW I there has been no lack of revolutionary situations. Spontaneous proletarian strivings for revolution in the 20th Century have been more frequent than that of any other class in history. However, in general, the failure of these revolutions we have analyzed as due to the lack of strong, uncompromising revolutionary parties, and the failure to build those parties prior to the spontaneous outbreak of working class rebellion and revolution. The working class under capitalism does not create forms for its economic rule, unlike the bourgeoisie which developed in the womb of feudal society. Rather, it creates institutions of workers democracy, unions, press, parties, etc - of which the revolutionary party is the highest form and the necessary vehicle for working class self-emancipation.

The tasks of such a party is to group together the most advanced sections of the working class on the basis of uncompromising class struggle politics. It must join socialist consciousness to the spontaneous struggles of the working class, be the

repository of the historical experiences of working class struggle, and the agency for raising the consciousness of the working class so that the working class is conscious of its historical mission and is qualitatively transformed so that it is capable of ruling society. Such a party must meet the centralization of capitals of capital and the state with its own centralization. It must be tightly disciplined to maximize its strength in action against its powerful enemies. But tight discipline and centralization demands with it the strictest internal democracy to maintain the control of the ranks over the leadership and organization. Its voluntary discipline is based on a highly conscious membership which represents the party and attempts to provide revolutionary leadership in the thousands of factories, mills, shops and offices.

### III

While most of the IS has accepted this conception of what a revolutionary party is, and of its necessity for a successful revolution, we have never fallen into the trap of deluding ourselves or pretending to the world that we are that party, not even in embryo form. Only an organization of tens of thousands, rooted in the working class, and commanding the allegiance of at least a significant section of the class, can make such a claim. While we are not the revolutionary party, we are a part of the process of creating that party. Our success or failure, are contributions to pace of development of the creation of a revolutionary party. The weakness of groups like ours is responsible for the slow development of struggles, and often for their derailment into political dead ends.

We believe that we are one nucleus of that future party and that our growth numerically and in political sophistication are one of the conditions for the development of a revolutionary party in the future. We believe it our tendency which today is best performing the task of educating socialists in what are the necessary politics of a revolutionary workers party - uncompromising defense of workers democracy, of joining revolutionary socialism to revolutionary democracy through a mass revolution from below. We attempt to maintain the traditions of revolutionary Marxism and apply them to the political and social problems of today. And it is our tendency which has consistently championed an approach that is both revolutionary in direction and related to the current consciousness of broad oppositional sentiment.

Yet while the unspoken assumption of the IS has been that the role of our organization is to train a revolutionary socialist cadre, we have not in the past conceived of ourselves as a cadre organization, or even come to grips with the problem of how to train cadre. There is even uncertainty in our ranks as to what cadre, and a cadre organization are.

Cadre is originally a military term which refers to the hard core, or skeleton of an army. It is the skeleton around which a mass army can be swiftly reconstructed in times of emergency, and also the permanent part of training units which exist to train new recruits to send out to other units. The use of the word cadre in the revolutionary movement is somewhat analogous. It refers to a hard core, skeleton organization which can successfully recruit, train and assimilate large numbers in a revolutionary period - such as for example the Bolshevik Party did in 1917, going from 20-30, 000 to 240, 000 members in the months between February

and October. This hard core or cadre are people who are thoroughly educated in the politics and program of the organization, are capable of defending and fighting for its ideas in public, are serious and disciplined in their functioning because of their conscious acceptance and agreement with most of the organizations politics. They are devoted, even fanatical, in their loyalty to and attempt to build the organization which expresses their political consciousness because they recognize that they and their organization are crucial in both the immediate period and in the future revolutionary period. The function of a cadre organization is to train all of its members in such a spirit, to develop all of them into self-confident mass leaders.

Although agreement with the basic program of the organization is the cement that holds the cadre together, political differences and disagreements are not to be avoided, but in fact encouraged in developing a cadre organization which is democratic, and whose members are thoughtful, independent leaders capable of initiative. Their devotion is not based on blind obedience, but on the consciousness developed by a healthy internal life in which ideas are treated seriously and respectfully, even when forcefully fought against. It is only the worst sort of sect, and one which will not make a great contribution to the formation of a revolutionary party, which sees disagreements, large or small, as a threat to its existence, and responds to any challenge to its ideas from its members by treating opposition as treason, or trying to personally or politically vilify and crush opposition. The disagreements which develop in a healthy cadre organization must do so in a spirit and atmosphere that allows for fruitful joint collaboration. The cadre must recognize that they have a mutual responsibility to each. They are a collective leadership group joined together by their common revolutionary ideas which far outshadow their disagreements. The effective development of the revolutionary movement they are building depends upon their assumption of collective leadership and disciplined activity.

In the past our organization often tended to rely upon the activity and initiative of a few leaders, and encouraged a subtle form of passivity in a membership which did not think of itself as "the cadre". If today it is possible to discuss transforming the IS into a cadre organization, it is because of the real, if small advances we have made. Although we have just gone through a period which has been a disaster for the radical movement, we have moved to being more of a national organization, of a growing seriousness in our ranks, and a deepening spirit of political commitment on the recognition that we are not just going to be active for the next 6 months or year and then go on to other things, but that we are developing our lives around the idea that we are revolutionaries. A big step in this direction has been the start of the industrialization of a part of our membership, which brings with it a new seriousness and responsibility to an organization which places such demands upon its members. We have also succeeded in fusing the bloc of tendencies which merged to form the IS in 1969. The IS is no longer half a dozen mutually suspicious different organizations but one organization, with the desire in its ranks to belong to one organization. That process of development into a coherent political tendency is not over, and will not be accomplished until there is a stable, central political leadership and an educated cadre of mass leaders working on a national basis to implement a common political program. The speed and

tempo at which we accomplish this has been given a new urgency by the new period which we are entering which has opened up new opportunities and placed new responsibilities and tests to our organization and the whole revolutionary movement.

#### IV

In addition to our subjective desire that we were a larger, and more well functioning organization, there is the objective requirements of the period in which we are entering. It is our conception that this new period will be one of a years long attack on the working class. The stagnant character of American captialism, its low rates of growth and increase in labor product ity, its outmoded plants has produced increasing difiiculties to meet internati al competition. This new stage of struggle for the world market willmean both inceased class struggle in all of the advanced capitalist countries, and new international tensions and crisis. While we cannot ~~at this~~ in advance pre the level and stages of working class response and struggle against this new attack, we need an organization which is sophisticated enough to have a progr: for the period, and flexible enough to shift its slogans and approach to meet a levels of working class response as it develops. We expect this to be a period prolonged struggle in which class questions and class politics are once again sharply in the consciousness of masses of workers. These questions are placed on apolitical agenda which is already overcrowded with war, the social struggle of blacks, women and other minorities, and the loss of confidence in authority and bourgeois values and at a time when there is a rise in working class militancy and the first seeds of radicalization within the working class.

In this period it is possible to be active participants in working class struggle and to help to provide the links between struggles in the factories and unions. In the working class there is a vacuum of political leadership which has retarded the development of struggle. Although we are not able to fill that vacuum, given our limited numbers and cadre, we must emmerse ourselves as activists in the class struggle, providing as much radical leadership as we are capable of and that the working class will accept. Our few experience in industry so far can lead to expect a limited amount of success, particularly as we develop experience.

We must use the test provided by this new period to as much as possible transform ourselves in a group which is based in the working class, which does not talk about a working class oréantation, but is a part of the working class and views things from the bantage point of a revolutionary workers organization. This does not mean in any way that our other activity - in the anti-war, women's, black and other movements, campuses, etc - should decline at all. On the contrary it should be ~~more~~ intensified as we move towards becoming a cadre organization, and enriched as we move towards becoming the working class, as opposed to working class oriented, wings of those movements. A serious revolutionary working class organization can expect to attract to itself bingnificant numbers of radical intellectuals who have been fragmented and demoralized by the disintergration of the radical student movement.

We must redouble our efforts at industrializing a significant part of the organization; not on the basis of moral exhortation or blackmail, but on the basis of political consciousness, ~~xxxxxx~~ and desire to be located in the most advantageous position to play an effective role in coming working class struggle. An organization based in the working class requires a different form than a student or intellectual organization. It requires different sorts of branches, branch activities, internal life and press. Our branches when we were based on the campuses and campus struggle revolved around a common arena in which the entire branch could be engaged, even when they were not direct participants. Our whole leadership could be thrown into any particular struggle which often had bad consequences for the development of newer comrades, but allowed us an important role. Internal education and contact work, even if that was not the best way, could be done on an informal, coffee klatsch style, since most of the branch saw each other practically every day. Full ideological discussion was common in competition with other sects. The loose and informal style we developed, whether or not it was the best one, was not always an obstacle, but often an aid in penetrating the student milieu around us.

An organization based in the working class requires a totally different form and style. Our arenas are fragmented and based around our work-places. To withstand the pressures of isolation and atomization we need strong fractions and well organized branch support for industrialized comrades. In the absence of a strong branch structure to provide guidance when there is no common arena many of the comrades have quietly dropped out of all arena work, reinforcing their sense of political isolation. The fragmented character of industrial work and of arenas today means that to rely on a few leaders is a luxury we cannot afford. Every comrade must be politically educated and developed in a systematic fashion so that they are capable of providing leadership in their work places and arenas. The lack of sharp ideological debate in the factories means that we must rely more heavily upon our press to do the job which we used to do verbally on the campuses. Contact work, which was always haphazard in the IS, is more difficult and serious in attempting to recruit workers to an organization which is so removed from their lives. It also requires a change in our branches so that workers, blacks, ~~workers and~~ ~~other~~ Chicacos and Puerto Ricans, who can be recruited in small numbers, do not feel that they are participating in somebody else organization, but can feel at home in the IS as their own organization, as the organization which is fighting for their liberation. To make this sort of transformation is extremely difficult. Not to attempt it at this time is to accept a limitation on our potential to develop as a revolutionary organization which in the long range can only be fatal.

The IS has not yet succeeded in securing itself as a firm propaganda group, in which its membership is educated in the politics which distinguish the organization and is capable of defending those politics intellectually and in action to the rest of the world. Its most immediate task is to solidify itself as a propaganda with a politically educated cadre before it can hope to become a large, agitational group. Those workers and members of racial minorities who join the IS will do so on the basis of our ideology, and will be integrated into the organization on the basis of their acceptance

of our ideology. But a group which attempts to base itself in the working class, even a propaganda group, cannot conceive of its role in narrow propaganda terms. The greatest mistake the Trotskyist movement made in this country was to narrowly conceive of itself as a propaganda group and therefore virtually ignore the organization of the CIO. A propaganda group which bases itself in the working class will be judged not just by its political program but also by its day to day activity in the class struggle, and by blacks and other minorities by its concrete role in the struggle against racism in the shops, unions and society. The tasks of a revolutionary working class cadre are two fold: to develop a politically conscious membership, and a membership which can raise agitational slogans and take leadership in the ongoing day to day class struggle.

To become a revolutionary cadre organization the IS establish the following organizational guidelines:

1. Industrialization. All branches will be asked to establish local concentration points for industrial work and will canvass the entire membership for candidates to industrialize. Nationally our concentrations will be in auto, telephone, teamsters, steel and public employees. Our next areas for colonization shall be in industry in Chicago and New Jersey with a perspective of securing full-time organizers for those branches in the next year. All branches must assign non-industrialized comrades to help industrialized comrades. All industrialized fractions, or comrades in the absence of fractions, must have either representation on branch execs or a liaison person on the branch exec who will keep that industrial work in the forefront of branch activity. All labor fractions and branches are requested to begin a discussion on how we can recruit and intergrate workers, including women, black and Spanish speaking workers, even though we do not expect to recruit large numbers of workers.

2. Education. Every ~~comrade is to have~~ branch is to have an educational director. Every comrade is to draw up in consultation with the branch educational director a 6 month educational ~~plan~~ reading plan. Comrades who require aid shall be assigned to older comrades to go over their readings with them. Every comrade is to be assigned an intellectual assignment in a 6 month period, whether it is to write an article or to prepare a branch report.

3. Mass arena. Every comrade is to be expected to have one mass arena. Industrial and union work are the priority mass arenas. Other comrades are expected to work in organizations, no matter how small, which place them in contact with non-ISers and allow them to train and develop themselves as mass leaders. All comrades should draw up a plan of action for their mass work and are expected to report to the organizer or exec at least once a month.

4. Organizational structure. Attendance is expected at all meetings. Comrades who cannot attend shall notify the branch organizer. Branch organizers shall be empowered to assign every comrade one weekly club assignment. Every branch must assign firm lines of responsibility, appointing branch treasurers secretaries who shall ~~send~~ send reports of all meetings to the national office, literature agent, WP local editor, WP distributor, and educational director.

5. Recruitment. Serious, systematic contact work, including reports at

all execs. The entire organization must be made conscious of the necessity to recruit in all its political work. Lack of recruitment can only be seen as lack of confidence in the organization and its politics. Newly recruited members shall be assigned to a responsible branch member who will help to find a level and place for activity for the new member, and shall work with them for 3 months and go over their political questions and education with them. Contacts shall be asked to and expect to help in collaboration with the organization whether in mass work, or in club work such as distributing WP or industrial bulletins.

6. Women comrades. All women's caucuses are requested to discuss how women comrades can be systematically advanced to leadership positions in the organization, how women can become politically educated cadre of the organization, and how the organization as a whole can support the work of the women comrades.