

VOLUME 6, SUMMER 2015

# UP **R**ISING

JOURNAL OF REVOLUTIONARY INITIATIVE

## LESSONS OF OUR PARTY BUILDING

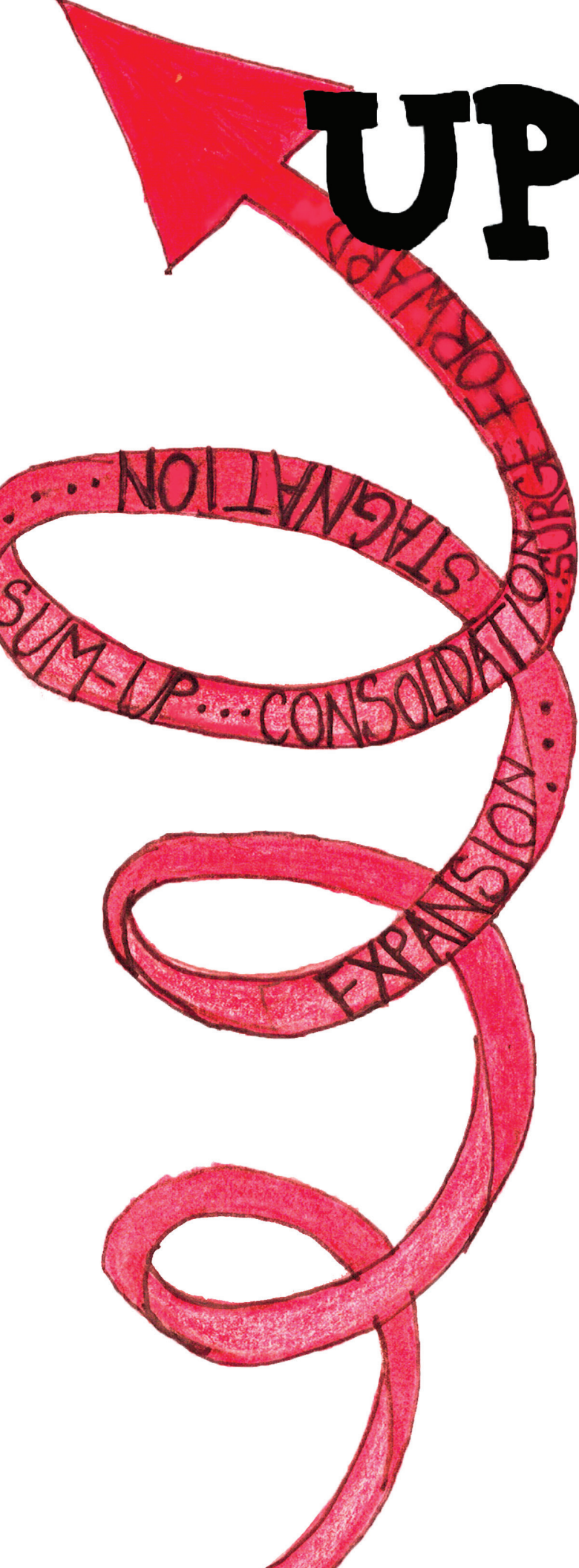
**ARTICLES ON**

**OUR INTERNATIONALISM**

**CORRECTING PROBLEMATIC  
PRACTICES AND TENDENCIES IN R.I.**

**PEDAGOGY AND  
COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP**

**EXPERIENCES WITH  
MASS LINE PRACTICE**







Women fighting imperialism and fascism in Spain: 1936.

The succession of cycles that makes up the chain of development can be represented as a spiral. "A development that repeats, as it were, stages that have already been passed, but repeats them in a different way, on a higher basis ('the negation of negation'), a development, so to speak, that proceeds in a spiral, not in a straight line" (Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 26, p. 55). In such a representation, each cycle is one turn, one twist, in the spiral of development, and the spiral itself is a chain of cycles. Although the spiral is only an image capturing the general direction of development that takes place in accordance with the law of complete return: development does not repeat the paths already gone through is not a return to that which has already been taken but seeks out new ones that conform to changed external and internal conditions. The more complex the process of development, the more relative is the repetition of certain features or properties encountered in previous stages.

The spiral characterizes not only the form but also the tempo of development. With each new turn, or twist, of the spiral, an even more significant path is left behind. Thus, it is possible to say that the process of development is linked with an acceleration of tempo and with continuous change in the internal time scale of a developing system. This regularity is found in the development of scientific knowledge, as well as in the development of society and of nature.

The Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 1979.

Women fighting imperialism and fascism in Kobane: 2014-2015.





# VOLUME #6 OF



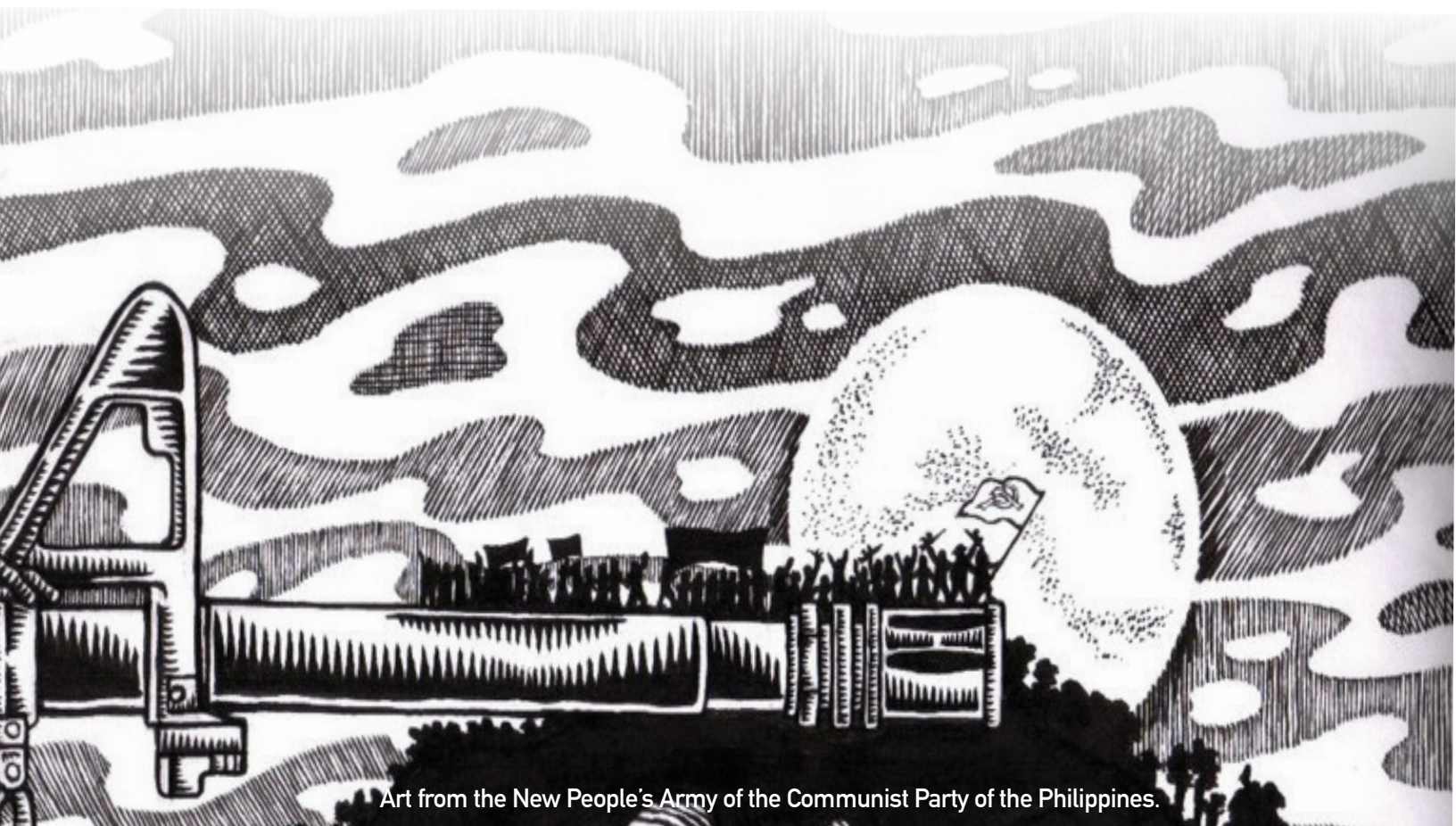
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Art from the New People's Army of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

# Sum up, surge forward

## Introduction to Issue #6



Issue #6 of *Uprising* has been a long time in the making and it emerges with little editorial foresight. Yet, it is perhaps the most significant issue we've published to date — if not for our readers, then certainly for the members of our organization. The contents of *Uprising* Issue #6 reflect aspects of a deep process of summation and reconfiguration that our organization has been undergoing for the past year. What all the contributions in this issue have in common is a tight dialectical relationship between theoretical advance and our practice. While this issue is far from a sum-up of everything we've done or all that we've learned, we share some points of self-criticism and reaffirm some basic principles with clearer strategic foresight.

As the spiral on our front page tries to illustrate, the dialectic of organizational growth is not a process of simple repetition on a larger scale. As we proceed to higher levels of development, further growth requires shedding the weaknesses or errors in previous methods, solving the fresh challenges that come with an expanded scale of work, and adapting to changed external conditions. But breaking with our incorrect or no-longer-useful methods can be difficult, especially when those worked for a time at a certain level of development. It is not easy to know where you are on the spiral until it has become painfully clear that you are in a moment of crisis. This was the state of our organization as of late 2013. Our theoretical

contributions on dual-power, hegemony, and women's liberation were sign posts for a future vision, but have we required a significant reevaluation of our past work and a reconceptualization of our methods to move forward. Another routine annual summation would not suffice. The various internal processes of critical assessment we have undergone would already contain within them the seeds of strategic reconceptualization, as the articles in Issue #6 attest to.

The first article in this issue, "Two Problematic Tendencies, and Two-Three Problematic Practices in R.I." is from Comrade Jameel and was originally written late 2013 for internal circulation in RI. Its purpose was to identify and struggle against incorrect or insufficient methods of work that had emerged over the years in our founding region of R.I. In this piece, Comrade Jameel criticizes the associated tendencies of ideologism and spontaneism - two aspects of a unified practice that relied heavily on ideological interventions from a distance to spark organization (*ideologism*) absent the protracted step-by-step mass organizing and face-to-face engagement that is required to actually build mass organizing (*spontaneism*). These tendencies expressed themselves, as Jameel points out, in a practice that was too defined by the "politics of commentary," "seminar politics," and organizing rallies and protests. Whatever the utility of such tactics, Jameel's article is a polemic and criticism of the unconscious

elevation of these tactics to the level of strategy on the part fellow comrades in his region. Jameel's article called for: a deeper theorization of our practice, plans for cadre building, an end to the diversions of "ambulance-chasing," and "an intensification of the proletarian character and composition of R.I. through mass work." At the time of Jameel's internal document, many members of his region had long been concerned with the need for R.I. to proceed to the "lower and deeper" sections of the proletariat.

A major strategic consideration motivating Jameel's intervention in the organizational context in which it was produced concerned the relationship between urban proletarian struggles and Indigenous peoples' struggles in Canada:

If we do not have people in urban areas organized and capable of taking concrete actions, no amount of seminars, rallies and commentaries in and around a limited group of people is going to help the cause of national liberation in a sustained and profound way. It is also only when we have folks organized in urban areas on a mass scale that we can then start to send them out for international exchanges or visits with Onkwehonwe peoples. Otherwise, it will just be a bunch of us already-converted folks and some new students we take with us, but not the lower and deeper sections of the proletariat (p.11, below).

If Comrade Jameel's article identifies the problems, Comrade Stella's article "What is the Mass Line?" begins to point us towards solutions -- at least at the level of abstraction. While these two pieces are not in direct conversation with one another, and though Stella's article speaks to her own participation in mass struggles that precede R.I., in many ways Stella's article anticipates if not motivates many of the changes that were coming for R.I. The tendency to view mass struggle or its emergence in overly spontaneist terms that Jameel criticizes is addressed by Stella's point that:

The step-by-step process of the mass line means learning what issues are impacting the working class and engaging in systematic investigation, education, and struggle... We cannot know the answer if we haven't engaged in collective process (dialogue and struggle) and

collective process takes time... The first step is taken by integrating with the people in an open and humble fashion with an intention to exchange ideas... If there are sparks of struggle, we are drawn there -- this is what social investigation is for. But finding the spark of struggle is just the beginning. This is the time that the deep social investigation begins, the results of which can be shared and disseminated through popular publications, handouts, and electronic media, raising class consciousness step-by-step: moving people along a trajectory of class consciousness towards an increasingly revolutionary perspective and challenging the ideas of the people that represent bourgeois individualism, or propagate racism and sexism among the people (p.14, below).

In contrast to the mass line practice, Stella warns of the influence of bourgeois / petty-bourgeois styles of learning and teaching, cautioning comrades against "building a great wall" between ourselves and the people by importing these methods of education into our work. Rather, we must absorb the knowledge and experiences of the oppressed and exploited, and disseminate the most advanced ideas among them.

Comrade Amil's article "The Pedagogy of Party Building" is part of the theoretical scaffolding to a major internal assessment and reconfiguration of leadership and cadre development that has been taking place within R.I. over the past six months.

An aspect of the internal crisis that R.I. confronted in 2014 was a crisis of leadership. While our internal debates on women's liberation infused energy into the organization with a new layer of initiative and leadership from women in the organization, as important as these have been for our internal transformation they are not sufficient to account for the changes our organization has undergone since late 2014. In our moment of uncertainty and crisis we became most innovative. We were confronted with the immediate necessity to theorize our past practice and the immediate problems facing us. The investigation of these concrete problems propelled the organization forward in many ways, and a part of this transformation has included the beginnings of a new cadre-building process that is informed by decades of collective experience of the cadre in our organization. Comrade



Amil's article discusses these transformations within a wider discussion of the importance of a *pedagogical praxis* in our party building. Amil explores the ideas of Paolo Freire in relation to his ongoing theoretical work of exploring Gramsci in relation to Mao.

Comrade Pierce's piece concerns a related but distinct component of our practice: our internationalism. While reaffirming foundational principles of R.I.'s proletarian internationalism -- especially, the strategic necessity of viewing the accumulation of revolutionary forces in Canada within the larger framework of the international proletarian revolution -- Pierce revisits these in light of a few years of practice to criticize certain deviations: namely,

...mistakes in the work put into building relationships at the international level. Time and energy was put into building relationships and solidarity with essentially social democratic forces that would have been better used in strengthening long term alliances with other revolutionary organizations (p.39, below).

On the basis of our past practices, Comrade Pierce offers clear criteria for a strategic approach to our internationalism, namely, what forces we relate to and why. Pierce's document sharpens our position that we view the accumulation of revolutionary forces in Canada as not only a struggle for socialism and national liberation (an end to internal colonialism) here, but a struggle against imperialism on a global scale.

### WHERE TO NOW: SURGE FORWARD?

To pull from the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* quote inside our front cover:

Development does not repeat the paths already taken but seeks out new ones that conform to changed external and internal conditions. The more complex the process of development, the more relative is the repetition of certain features or properties encountered in previous stages... With each new turn, or twist, of the spiral, an even more significant path is left behind.

We are at a turning point in our organization, coming close to the end of a period of consolidation, and upon a new phase of

expansion. We are continuing the project commenced by R.I. nine years ago, even while we make a break with some of our past practices. We remain committed to building a revolutionary organization of the oppressed and exploited in the territories claimed by Canada in order to abolish Canada as we know it, and replace it with a socialist and multi-national society that destroys the foundations of internal colonialism. The precise form of such a post-revolutionary society cannot be anticipated in its exact form, but to the extent that it can we must develop a program for such a society with all revolutionary forces, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, that can be united to destroy Canadian imperialism and internal colonialism.

We know that we need a clear program for advancing revolutionary struggle, and so this objective is at the very top of our list of things to accomplish in the coming 1-2 years. We especially need to theorize revolutionary feminism and revolutionary anti-colonialism and national liberation as part of our vision for socialism. We are moving ahead with the development of this program hand-in-hand with developing the cadre-level of our organization and deepening our base amongst the proletarian and nationally-oppressed masses.

As for the additional theoretical tasks we believe require research, internal education, elaboration, and struggle to get us to a draft Program, these include:

- An outline of the recent transformations within and current state of the imperialist world system;
- An elaboration of the dynamics of capital accumulation in Canada, Canadian imperialism's place in the imperialist world system, and the relationship of these to revolutionary struggle in Canada and across the world;
- A comprehensive class analysis of Canadian society (which will be a prerequisite for a revolutionary strategy), with a specific elaboration on the differences between the super-exploited and exploited versus non-exploited (worker elite) strata. We must also draw out the necessary political conclusions from our ongoing theoretical work on reproductive labour and women's exploitation;

- Providing materialist explanations of oppressed nations, national minorities, and internal colonialism in Canada and the role of migration and gender in producing super-exploited strata of the proletariat;
- An analysis of the specific forms of national oppression in Canada, particularly Indigenous and Afrikan peoples, and how do these differ from the forms of oppression faced by other national minorities. Elaborate the place of national liberation in the socialist revolution.
- An analysis of how hegemony and domination are exercised by the Canadian bourgeoisie in the current context, the role played by the coercive apparatuses of the State in dominating certain sections of the population while other institutions (philanthro-capitalist institutions, unions, multiculturalism, citizenship, religious institutions) produce a consensual order for much of the rest of the population.

We will be undertaking these theoretical tasks while sharpening of our praxis of mass organizing, developing the methods for carving out popular power “from the hood to the rez,” and growing our organization across the territories claimed by Canadian imperialism on Turtle Island. As we collect our experiences like apples in an orchard, we must use learn how to use them and take action. If not, the apples will perish and will be lost. Insights into our past are as precious as the fruit from a tree, and understanding history, and our history, gives us new resolve and energy to tackle the obstacles ahead. We will face our responsibilities and tasks with all due humility and seriousness while working with other genuinely revolutionary forces in unity and struggle for the correct line and practice.

-*Uprising* Editors

## The Legacy of Canada's Residential Schools

Odds of **dying** for **children** in **Indian residential schools**:

**1** in **25**

Odds of **dying** for **Canadians** serving in **WWII**:

**1** in **26**

Canada's genocidal residential schools were project that went hand-in-hand with the accumulation of capital in Canada. How can we "reconcile" with this past when it remains very much the preset: when ongoing reality of colonial violence and dispossession is a feature of capital accumulation in Canada's sizable extractive industries? The task of our organization is to put forward a strategy to actually end the genocidal national oppression of Indigenous peoples in Canada with a vision to unify the proletariat -- Indigenous, settler, and migrant.

# TWO PROBLEMATIC TENDENCIES, & TWO-THREE PROBLEMATIC PRACTICES IN RI

by Comrade Jameel M.

Early 2014

*This document was originally written in late 2013 for internal circulation in RI to identify and struggle against problematic tendencies in the mass work of RI members in its founding region. It should not necessarily be taken as a characterization or summation of the work of RI members in all regions.*

-Editorial Note

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**The first tendency is what I am calling, for lack of a better term, ideologism.** This means to hold that if we “get the ideology correct” and propagandize with the ideology, or if we train ourselves properly in revolutionary theory and ideology, we can solve a number of problems, namely:

1. We can recruit people into RI effectively.
2. We can give confidence to comrades who may not be confident in engaging with mass activists and revolutionary mass activists, or who may not be confident in taking on leadership positions.

There had been a considerable emphasis in RI on completing a project that identified the historical development of the contradictions that exist in Canadian society. However, this project reflected in many ways a form of book-worship, valuing already-produced intellectual information above and beyond concrete investigation on the ground. For one, most of this project would have to be informed by secondary research rather than any wealth of primary social investigation and class analysis (SICA) that we would have conducted ourselves. Although it would have helped in the formulation of a program, it could only do so in concert with proper SICA conducted on the ground, which requires far greater emphasis. Moreover, if we think that publishing a book

would attract people to RI, then we need to reconsider what kind of people we expect to attract with what would ultimately have been a semi-academic treatise on the history of Canada.

Similarly, the idea that in a cadre school we would teach people proper revolutionary theory in the abstract, and that would enable them to become effective leaders, was not entirely correct. It is true that effective leadership requires theoretical knowledge, but it also requires organizational skills which come in part from training and also from practice. Practice must be undertaken with the knowledge that it may well fail, or may be limited. But almost any practice yields a considerable set of ideas that outstrip what would be garnered simply from training in revolutionary theory.

To quote Mao Zedong:

Where do correct ideas come from? Do they drop from the skies? No. Are they innate in the mind? No. They come from social practice, and from it alone; they come from three kinds of social practice, the struggle for production, the class struggle, and scientific experiment. It is [a human]’s social being that determines his[her] thinking...

Although collectively we had been developing a theory of dual power, we had not actually located this theory in the concrete mass work undertaken by members of RI over the past five years, or even before that. Members of RI have been involved in a wide variety of fields, as RI members or before they joined RI, from workers’ struggles, to national minority struggles, to organizing in proletarian neighbourhoods, to police brutality work, to name but a few.

However, there had been no synthesis of practical experience with theoretical devel-



opments. There had been, in other words, no theorization of our own practice, such that we may practice a living and breathing theory and pull a concretely posed strategy with concretely posed tactics out of that. (This also relates to the point of organizational skills: although some of us had developed such skills, we had not assessed organizational forms and practices that have worked best, what have not worked well, how to pass on such skills to others, and our own individual weaknesses that need to be remedied through organizational reinforcement.)

As a result, when we did speak to potential recruits or to each other we could only speak in the abstract, pointing to the concrete in, at best, an incoherent way, or pointing to the Black Panther Party or similar revolutionary projects – because we had not come up with a coherent summation of our own concrete practice. Moreover, our cadre school was not conceived with practical aspects of organizing in mind, for which I take some criticism, having been responsible for putting much of it together. We must now think of concrete organizational skills such as conducting social investigation, distinguishing between setting out objectives and developing a concrete plan to achieve those objectives, planning one's own life, conflict resolution, and most importantly, actually developing a method and practice of organizing people.

To put it in another way, we had not practiced criticism and self-criticism of our own practices in a coherent way. Why have the various initiatives we have underpinned not taken solid root? What were our individual, organizational, practical and theoretical failings? What were our successes and what lessons are we to take forward? We did not engage in sufficient assessment along these lines.

We must “orientate [our] thinking correctly, become good at investigation and study and at summing up experience, overcome difficulties, commit fewer mistakes, do [our] work better, and struggle hard so as to build” ourselves into a good socialist movement, to riff on Mao.

To be clear, I am not making an anti-intellectualist argument here. It is vital to have theory, and to clarify and consistently develop

revolutionary theory. But it is vital that this emerges to a considerable part from our own experiences, and always is related to consistent and continued mass work.

**The second tendency, related to the first, is *spontaneism*.** We believed that interventions in areas where the action is hot with the “correct” line and ideology would draw people to us. But, as a police brutality incident indicated, people may not come through to organize with us in the long-term, for example, if the people who are victims of or leading affectees are mollified by reaction or reformism instead of being effectively organized by us. We are then left having invested time and resources into people without any gains, not least of all because of a paucity of our own leadership. Alternatively, consider disasters and emergencies, and how distant we are from putting ourselves together to actively intervene with practical and ideological leadership in proletarian neighbourhoods.

The problem is one of not being embedded enough amongst masses such that when an event or situation develops, we are already there. We are already known, we are already recognized, and we are already – at least somewhat – trusted. We can then be in a better position to play a decisive role in leading people through problems when they do pop off, rather than simply reacting and chasing ambulances.

We cannot predict what conjunctural event will happen or will mobilize the masses in great numbers. However, we can predict that more and more conjunctural events will occur if the state continues to disinvest in social protection and further invest in militarization and policing. The question is if we are there in the structural cracks to play a role of coordination and connection, or if we keep running after the symptoms without rooting ourselves solidly in the structure.

Revolutionary communists organizing in other countries often spent a lot of time developing a network for their party in various villages. They might even spend one or two years working on just one person in a village. But once that person (often, a teacher or other trusted and progressive minded person) was on board, then s/he could bring more people on board and grow the organization in that

area. When something popped off, they were already there, or when the broader campaign/mass mobilization reached that village, they were already prepared. However, for us, the question is of getting in touch with folks in proletarian neighbourhoods to begin with and to gain their trust. For that, we will have to go out there and engage with them consistently.

We have to concentrate our forces geographically and/or sectorally, and build by having concrete plans to engage masses outside of the already-converted mass of left-leaning progressives. For example, can we have a fighting women's organization in the abstract? Or can we have a fighting women's organization when it is connected to community organizing and work amongst the masses of proletarian women? Can we mobilize students in the abstract by waving red banners and picture of Mao Zedong on university campuses? Or can we mobilize students by organizing in and around their high schools before they even (don't) get to university?

Other left-leaning progressives may well come to us when they see our example, as I did from seeing the principled and deep early mass work carried out by RI members and revolutionary mass activists around RI. However, focusing on the already-existing pool of progressives means ignoring the vast unorganized sections of the working-class.

### TWO-THREE PROBLEMATIC PRACTICES

The upshot of ideologism and even spontaneism is that we located ourselves in two or three practices that petty bourgeois communists and activists find the most comfortable: 1) seminar politics, 2) the politics of commentary, and perhaps 3) rallies/protest politics.

Seminar politics is where we organize seminars, often located at university campuses, and at best, once in a while, off campus. In other words, rather than going to the masses, we expect some section of the masses to come to us, but in truth we were only speaking to the converted and to some new students. Seminars are not, in and of themselves bad, but they are problematic when they become the primary form of our organized engagements.

The politics of commentary refers to

when we become very good analysts of situations, events and issues from a Maoist/anti-imperialist perspective. That is great, but unless it emerges from systematic SICA and embeddedness amongst the masses it risks becoming yet another staid socialist or activist propaganda outlet that has no organizational base other than a network of nostalgic subscribers or converted academics, semi-academics, old activists and new students.

Rallies are often related to the two, insofar as they may emerge from some form of preparation done through seminars and commentaries. We may want to march through proletarian neighbourhoods, but what's the point if there is no sustained organizing beforehand to make those proletarians actually want to engage with us? What's the point if we don't produce mass organizations beforehand that take an active role in organizing marches and giving them a deeper and more embedded proletarian character?

To be sure, seminars, commentary and rallies are not spaces to abandon, but these are spaces that are only ever, at best, secondary to the work of going to the lower and deeper sections of the proletariat and building mass organizations therein. The more superficial spaces may provide spaces for consolidation of some revolutionaries, but risk becoming the space in which revolutionaries think they are doing radical work when in fact they are not doing anything particularly radical at all. Going into a committee or a meeting and speaking truth to power is not radical, quite the contrary, that is precisely the essence of reformism.

International solidarity is, unfortunately, a sector of politics that easily gets bogged down in seminar politics and commentary politics. We see a situation developing somewhere overseas or perhaps with the oppressed nations inside the Canadian social formation, and we throw up a seminar, organize a rally (maybe), and write an article about it. That is fine as far as it goes, but if that is all we are able to do then we are going to be at a loss when it comes to forming a revolutionary organization.

The problem of superficial engagement is all the more pointed when considering the relations of non-Indigenous struggles and the



struggles of oppressed Onkwehonwe nations in the Canadian social formation. The best way to conduct international solidarity with oppressed Onkwehonwe nations in the Canadian social formation appears to me to be to build fighting proletarian mass organizations in urban areas – naturally this will also involve organizing the Onkwehonwe people who live in urban areas, but forming united fronts of Onkwehonwe organizations with the organizations of other oppressed nationalities (immigrants, migrants) and white proletarians.

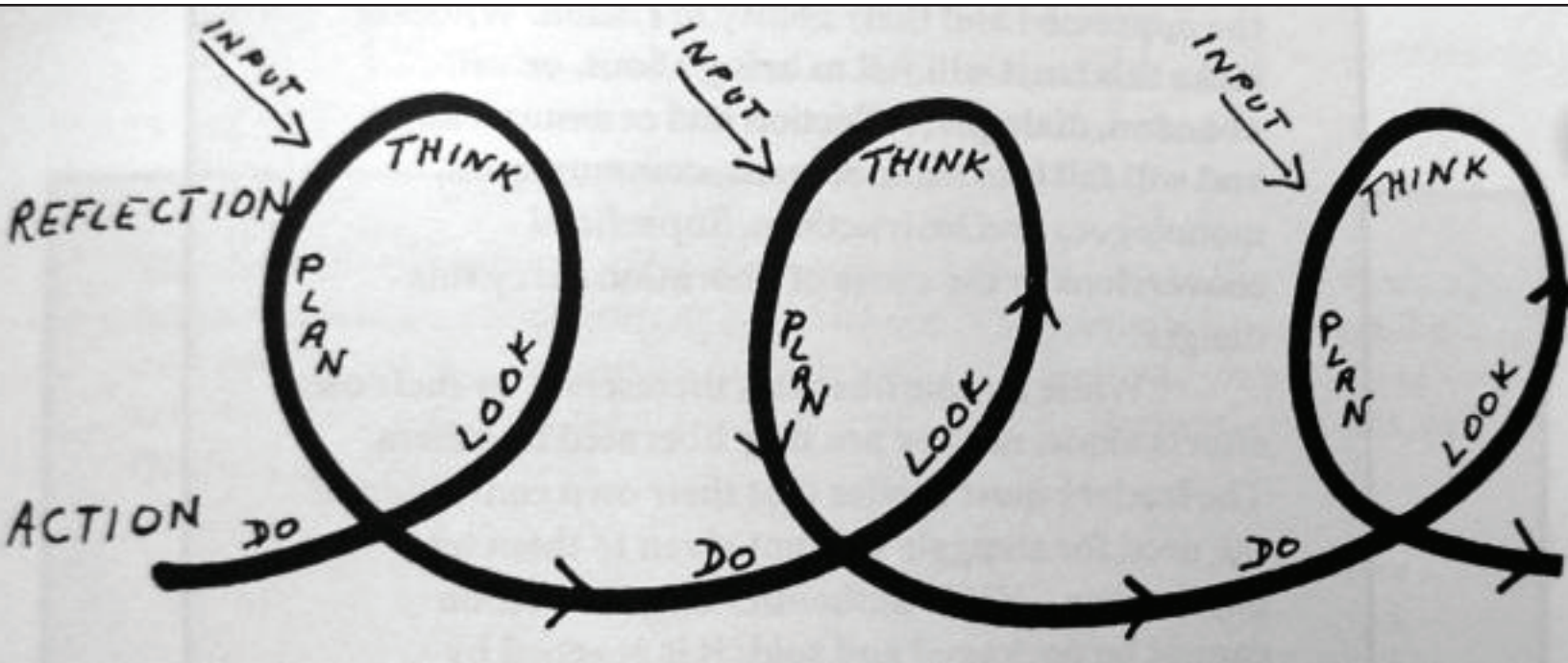
If we do not have people in urban areas organized and capable of taking concrete actions, no amount of seminars, rallies and commentaries in and around a limited group of people is going to help the cause of national liberation in a sustained and profound way. It is also only when we have folks organized in urban areas on a mass scale that we can then start to send them out for international exchanges or visits with Onkwehonwe peoples. Otherwise, it will just be a bunch of us already-converted folks and some new students we take with us, but not the lower and deeper sections of the proletariat.

Similarly, with international solidarity abroad, the question we must ask ourselves is how we can use such campaigns to organize proletarians here and press to them the importance of making connections between imperialism abroad and capitalism here in the belly of the beast. That is, anti-imperialism must be ultimately brought to anti-capitalist and socialist politics here. Perhaps the most effective form of action is the opposite, that is, organizing people around their issues as they face them here, bringing them to anti-capitalist and socialist politics, is the most effective way of developing an analysis of imperialism and anti-imperialism.

Stagnation in seminar politics and commentary politics and rally/protest politics – and the ideologism and spontaneism that can give birth to them – are both symptoms and causes of disconnection from the lower and deeper sections of the proletariat.

**We must rectify this.**

- **Pass on organizational/organizing skills along with revolutionary theory.**
  - **Develop concrete plans (not just lists of objectives) for mass work, training in ideology and skills, and consolidation and growth.**
  - **Refrain from prioritizing ambulance-chasing, seminar, rally and commentary politics, unless tied strategically into a plan of mass work. Prioritize the planned mass work.**
  - **Practice our theory: work amongst the masses and build mass organizations through concentration of our forces. (You need masses to practice mass line, otherwise it is abstract.)**
  - **Intensify the proletarian character and composition of RI through mass work.**
- **Sum up our mass work, theorize our practice and extract organizational lessons.**



# What is the Mass Line?

## *Some experiences and reflections*

by Comrade Stella B.

June 2014

This article is an attempt to pull together a theoretical synthesis of my own practical experiences, to draw the general from the specific, and share these general thoughts with my fellow cadres. I hope this article can open up discussion and dialogue and encourage comrades to action.

And that was, what the Chinese call the mass line, which means, confidence that the mass of the ordinary people, given the right inspiration, drive, motivation and leadership, can accomplish miracles and can change everything. And change everything for the better. This is what the masses of the people can do.<sup>1</sup>

The mass line is an integral component of Maoism; it must be given serious consideration, for when we talk about applying Maoism to our context, and of being Maoists, mass line practice is central to this. Mass line is one of the most important methods for revolutionaries striving to tear down the old world of imperialism and build a new world according to the needs of the exploited and oppressed sectors of society and driven by the enormous

creativity, ingenuity and power of the people.

In our work as revolutionaries within an imperialist country, correct application of the mass line is paramount! The dictatorship of the proletariat is a political necessity and armed struggle is inevitable. However, it is the ideological orientation and practical organization of society that is pivotal to the success of both. Not only is the mass line central to the success of our revolutionary efforts, it is a great process to engage in now in our non-revolutionary context. We can and must strive to unleash the potential of the masses.

Mao calls on revolutionary cadre to “go to the masses and learn from them, synthesize their experience into better, articulated principles and methods, then do propaganda among the masses, and call on them to put these principles and methods into practice so as to solve their problems and help them achieve liberation and happiness.”<sup>2</sup> This is a neat summation of a challenging and often painstaking process of raising class consciousness in working class

1. Joshua Horn, 1971, “The Mass Line”: <http://www.massline.info/China/JHorn-ML.htm>

2 Mao Zedong, November 29, 1949, “Get Organized”: [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3\\_17.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_17.htm)



communities, engaging people in mass formations, sharply critiquing bourgeois society from the perspective of the working class, propagating class consciousness and revolutionary ideas, building mass-based campaigns to engage us in class struggle, debating and discussing our visions of a future society, and all of this within a framework of proletarian internationalism.

A comrade I've worked with on a number of projects defines the mass line as:

- The communist method of leadership – from the masses to the masses – a method present in communist organization from its earliest beginnings but articulated as conscious theory by Mao as part of the Chinese revolution;
- A revolutionary method aimed at transformative social change – dealing with underlying issues of power and control;
- A method used by conscious organizers working to change society; and
- The resolution of the apparent (superficial) contradiction between Marxist theory (the masses are the makers of history) and Leninist practice (the practical need for organization and discipline in the process of making a revolution).

The mass line is a reiterative and dialectical process that involves digging below the appearances of society to the essence of material reality through effective social investigation, applying an accurate and contextual class analysis, and directly engaging in class consciousness raising and class struggle through education, organization, and mobilization. Each time this cycle repeats, more is known about the material conditions and struggles of the working class, our class analysis becomes sharper, our ability to mobilize the masses increases, and our weapon of theory is honed.

For the past two decades I've been involved in several conscientious, popular applications of mass line practice based on the class struggles of working class communities. This is an attempt to sum up general lessons and dig into the essence of a strong mass line practice.

## FOUR INTERRELATED OBSERVATIONS ON THE APPLICATION OF THE MASS LINE

### 1. STRUGGLE WITH THE MASSES IS A STEP BY STEP PROCESS

First and foremost, an effective application of the principles of mass line, or “from the masses, to the masses,” takes a great deal of time: time spent face-to-face with people wherever they are, one-on-one, in groups, on the streets, in homes, in meetings.<sup>3</sup>

Some revolutionary organizations interpret the application of mass line as putting out the best argument or line to sway the masses. But the mass line is a political, organizational, and ideological practice, not a slogan or mere political position. This un-dialectical approach of sloganeering will lead to errors and isolation. Some revolutionary organizations interpret the mass line as disseminating communist analysis to the masses through newspapers, party propaganda, and militant actions; this type of practice is a form of commandism. In my experience this only alienates communists and cuts us off from access to the main revolutionary forces of society.

The step-by-step process of mass line means learning what issues are impacting the working class and engaging in systematic investigation, education, and struggle. I identify as the main revolutionary forces as low-waged and precarious working class communities, predominantly communities of colour, and indigenous communities. The working class is constantly inundated with conservative, racist, and anti-communist ideas propagated by the bourgeoisie. The internally colonized and oppressed indigenous peoples' are in constant

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<sup>3</sup> Mike Ely of the Kasama Project makes a point about underestimating the role of consciousness, and in my experience, building consciousness can take a lot of time – it doesn't always, but it can involve multiple discussions and debates. It is arrogant and commandist to think that revolutionary cadre have the right answers and little to learn in this type of exchange – this is the best form of social investigation into the ideas of the people. See Mike's article here: <http://kasamaproject.org/revolutionary-strategy/4041-73two-concepts-of-mass-line-two-different-roads-part-1>

struggle for survival and are already actively engaged in critical anti-colonial struggles. Simply trying to flog a revolutionary paper or a communist 'line' in these contexts can be a major set-back for communist practice and repeats (actively fails to rectify) the mistakes that have already been made by non-indigenous communists working on indigenous territories across the globe.<sup>4</sup> We cannot know the answer if we haven't engaged in collective process (dialogue and struggle) and collective process takes time.

Furthermore there are dozens of examples in the history of revolutionary practice where communists got something wrong, from how production could be better organized to how diseases spread. It was only with the patient application of the mass line process that errors were corrected.<sup>5</sup>

Mass line is a step-by-step process, and the first step is taken by integrating with the people in an open and humble fashion with an intention to exchange ideas. We must not underestimate the ideological and organizational stranglehold of the bourgeoisie over the masses, or we will be unsuccessful in reaching out to those potentially revolutionary forces that have an underdeveloped class analysis. In this context we must recognize the prevailing attitudes and ideas of the masses, and start from this basis. If there are sparks of strug-

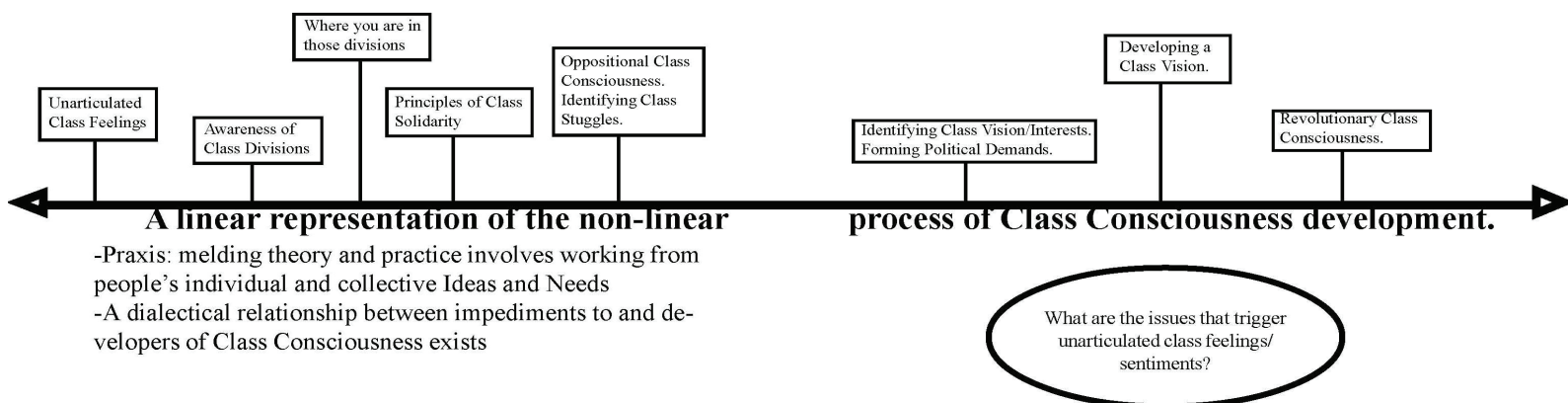
4. For a good historical documentary on this issue, "Green Guerillas" by Rod Prosser, available to view on YouTube.

5. Study both mass line and dialectical materialism! Philosophy is integral to the communist imagination – reflecting on past experiences through study of mass line and dialectical materialism can garner significant insights and help revolutionaries build on strengths and correct our inevitable mistakes and weaknesses.

gle, we are drawn there – this is what social investigation is for. But finding the spark of struggle is just the beginning. This is the time that the deep social investigation begins, the results of which can be shared and disseminated through popular publications, handouts, and electronic media, raising class consciousness step-by-step: moving people along a trajectory of class consciousness towards an increasingly revolutionary perspective and challenging the ideas of the people that represent bourgeois individualism, or propagate racism and sexism among the people.

Very few people make a great leap from an almost complete lack of class consciousness to being a revolutionary. For most, this is a process that can take much longer, and being an effective communist leader means taking the time to engage the issues and build unity on class analysis. Avoid **commandism** by taking the time necessary to "explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action."<sup>6</sup> Avoid **tailism** by being willing to share criticisms and challenge other organizers when they drift into **economism, reformism or movementism** (see Glossary of Terms on next page for definitions of these words).

On the question of issue selection and propaganda work, we must not fear the *appearance* of being reformist. We must be engaging in those struggles that we assess are critical for defending the interests of the working class; where the masses are actually at in terms of consciousness; where we have the best chance at advancing a vibrant class struggle.  
6 Mao, "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership."



-Praxis: melding theory and practice involves working from people's individual and collective Ideas and Needs  
-A dialectical relationship between impediments to and developers of Class Consciousness exists



The most important leap we can make at this moment is to carve out opportunities to work alongside the main forces in mass struggles, and to engage in discussions and analysis as leaders, infusing a communist revolutionary perspective. Through correct action, and not through convincing words, will we build the historic alliances necessary to bring down imperialism.

## 2. DON'T BUILD A GREAT WALL

In his inspiring lecture from 1971, Joshua Horn likens the arduous bourgeois professional educational process to building the Great Wall of China, meaning that a vast expanse of knowledge and a great many technical criteria must be met before one can engage in practice.<sup>7</sup> **Bourgeois-style education is the opposite of the dialectical process of the mass line.**

When starting with a new mass line practice, even the more experienced among us must take time to learn the basics of a new situation. A good leader is patient, ready for the repetitious cycles of *experience-analysis-action* that build our knowledge and skills and continue to sharpen our class analysis. Our skills

<sup>7</sup> Joshua Horn, *Ibid.* More importantly, see Horn's book, *Away with All Pests: An English Surgeon in People's China, 1954-1969.*

as MLM revolutionaries in structural analysis and critical thinking are important to share with new mass organizers. We can share these skills both through the practice of collective class analysis and through agitational propaganda that clearly lays out structural analysis through using the examples of the particular issues facing the communities we seek to organize. Every time I lead a popular workshop or public meeting I learn new things about the conditions and issues, as well as the desires and visions, of working class communities. Many times mass organizers are allowed very intimate and personal glimpses into working class lives and using people's own lived experiences to explain class analysis can be transformative for people.

As leaders and as revolutionary mass organizers we know that building democratic mass formations and engaging working class communities in class struggle necessitates activating new cadres and providing training. **The best way to not learn is to do nothing practical is to erect a Great Wall between revolutionary cadres and the masses.**

The very best communist education builds theory out of practice: starting with reflection on lived experiences as the first material practice, and then building with each cycle of education-organization-mobilization, continually deepening theoretical study of Marxism

## Glossary of Terms

**Commandism:** The practice of using individual influence or the power of the party to direct mass organizations or mass struggle, rather than working to win over the masses to the correct course of action through persuasion and education (correct application of the mass line).

**Tailism:** The tendency to underestimate the political consciousness of the masses or to pander to conservative or reactionary elements among the masses. This involves determining a course of action based on the 'lowest common denominator' in terms of political consciousness, rather than engaging in principled struggle, through persuasion and education, to win the masses over the correct revolutionary course of action (correct application of the mass line).

**Economism:** The practice of focusing entirely on economic struggles, struggles for immediate economic gains for the working class, while neglecting revolutionary political work.

**Reformism:** The view of reforms as an end in itself rather than as a tactic connected to a revolutionary strategy. Some reformists expect that an accumulation of reforms will resolve all of the 'problems' in society, others argue that the masses are 'not ready' to talk about revolution.

**Movementism:** The view that positive social change will come as the result of an accumulation of the power and influence of 'social movements'. It is unclear how these social movements would affect the overthrow of the current system or what kind of social organization would be built in its place. Movementism is also the tendency to put all of one's energy into the building of 'broad movements' at the expense of building revolutionary organization.

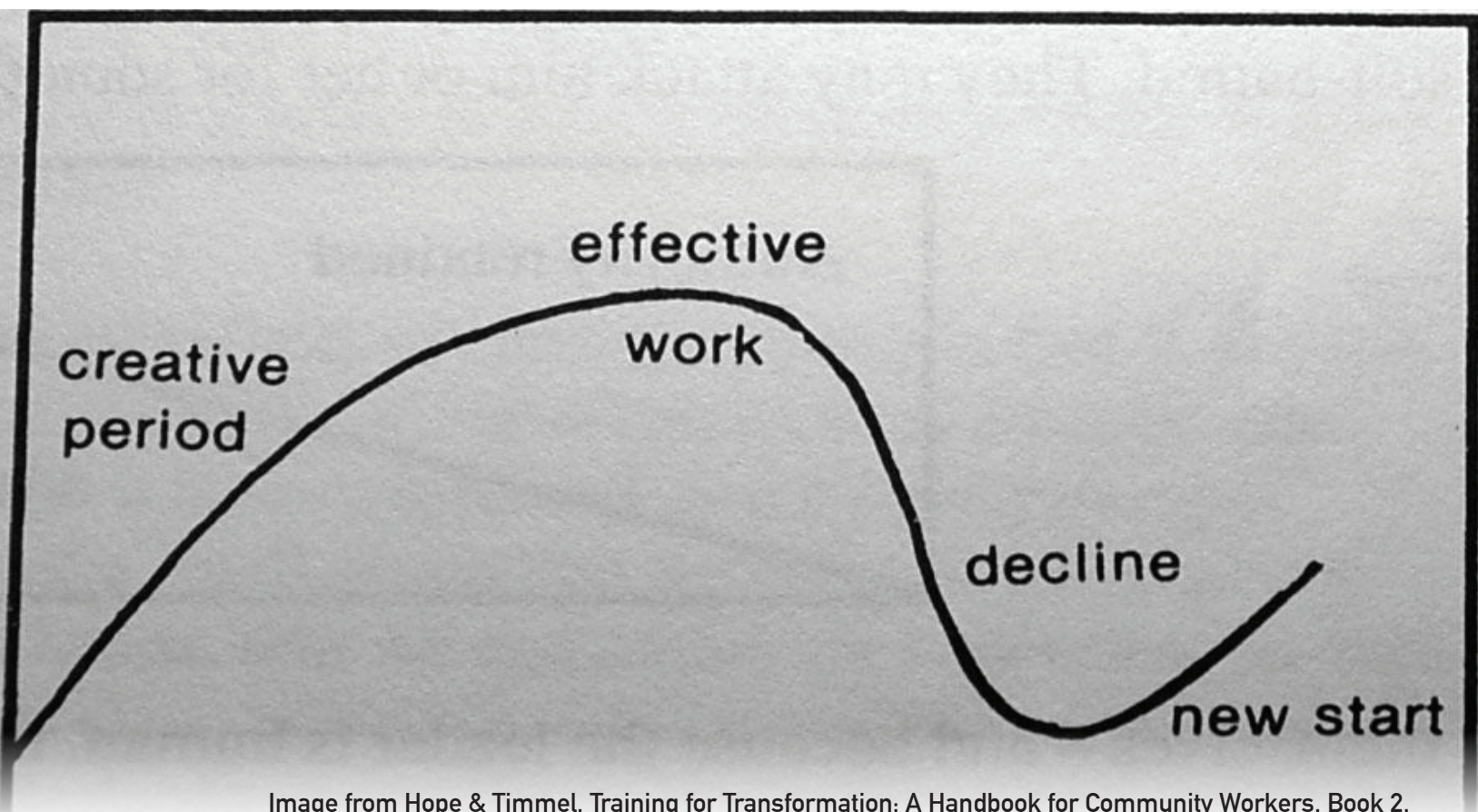
according to the practical experiences of the organizer. Cadre schools and dedicated studies are important opportunities for organizers to discuss and reflect together on their experiences and share lessons and successes, but without prior practical experience theoretical learning is truncated. Linking reflection to action is the best strategy for learning mass line practice.

“Building a great wall” between ourselves and the people occurs when we believe we need to have answers before we get started. Democratic formations which are the basis of people power take time and patience, and the structures adopted will change over time. Mass organizations expand and contract according to prevailing conditions. This is the natural cycle of mass organizing, so be prepared for the inevitable down-cycle. That is the time to reflect, assess, produce a written sum-up, and discuss where to initiate the next round of social investigation. Holding mass leadership together during the natural decline is a critical role of revolutionary cadres.

Finally, building a Great Wall happens when we elevate the material interests of the petty-bourgeoisie in our mass line practice. We must be diligent to prevent side-tracking

and accommodation to the needs and values of petty-bourgeois individuals for they will steer us in the wrong direction. This form of Great Wall effectively stifles the full creativity of the working class through petty-bourgeois values of individualism, economism, and wrong ideas of success. For example, in health work, physicians are, by law, allowed to practice what are called medically-restricted acts, but in many revolutionary health projects the masses take up these skills and often apply them in innovative, exciting, and revolutionary ways! Many diseases defined by Western bourgeois medicine have been identified by revolutionaries as diseases of capitalism and colonialism. Dedicated social investigation and scientific application of historical materialism pushes us to understand the structural origins of disease and encourage mass campaigns for social, economic, and environmental justice as a component of striving for health for all. This is mass line in action, and it awakens and incites people to struggle.

Perhaps in a truly revolutionary context, such as in the Philippines, Nepal, or elsewhere, a united front forms an integral component of the national democratic struggle. But until we have aroused the masses of the working





class to lead the revolution where we are at, the material interests of the bourgeoisie will continue to predominate and must be endlessly rooted out of our minds and actions. Our basic analysis and institutions of the class need to be solid (especially in this context) before we can effectively lead the petty-bourgeoisie and not be distracted and misguided by their participation. If we can't lead the working class, we definitely can't lead the petty bourgeoisie, who have their own forms of leadership. In order to build an effective united front, the petty bourgeois elements must be kept accountable to the working class, and this requires an organized working class with representative leadership to be accountable to.

### 3. WALKING ON TWO LEGS

"It is people, and not things, that are the decisive factor and that so long as the initiative and creativity of the masses are brought into full play difficulties can be overcome".

-Chiang Shan-hao, 1974,  
"Mass Line in Road Building":

Walking on two legs means that the knowledge and experience of the working class is just as important as any bourgeois knowledge, and in fact is the decisive factor. Walking on two legs highlights that drawing out this knowledge and experience, and honing it into the expertise necessary to build a new and better world, is a learned process whose goal is to develop a new working class knowledge and science. For workers possess not only the best knowledge of what working class needs are, but also the best knowledge of how things could be done better. Propagating the expertise of the working class, the brilliant ideas for change, motivates people to keep struggling.

As revolutionary mass activists we can learn to challenge narrow one-sided thinking. Problem solving is the goal of the mass line. In my experience, with each cycle of social investigation and class analysis mass experiences are better synthesized and the ideas for change grow stronger.

Using one example of a cycle of education-organization-mobilization in a working class urban centre in Canada, our initial social

investigation identifies that many working class communities rely heavily on services targeted by neoliberal cutbacks – hence the line of "defend public services" resonates with the masses. When presented with the class analysis on how our communities will be impacted by cut backs, people are eager to be organized and are ready to be mobilized to participate in mass action. On sum up organizers identified that there was much more to learn about how public services could be improved, and how services are truncated by bourgeois economic limitations and public spending on unnecessary expenditures such as the expansion of policing. Deeper social investigation in our communities through public meetings, direct contact organizing with people in public spaces involving hundreds of conversations with workers led to the bolstering of the line to not only defend, but to expand public services. The organization then called for the state to divert monies from such things that harm working class communities into such things that could benefit working class communities, such as increased early morning and late night services to meet the needs of shift workers and parents. People respond well to the call that working class people are the experts on what the working class needs, and mass line practice demonstrated this. This is not only economic struggle, but political and ideological struggle. It facilitates class consciousness, challenges bourgeois individualism, raises consciousness on structural racism and sexism, and moves people from shared experience into collective struggle.

Walking on two legs occurs when working class knowledge and expertise equals that of bourgeois professional knowledge, and working class communities start to demand leadership in their own affairs. Once people have some experience using critical thinking and developing class analysis, they are far more open to being organized at a deeper level into revolutionary organization.

#### 4. STRIKE WITH A WHOLE FIST

One question was, how is it that the Chinese can succeed in re-attaching these severed fingers and limbs whereas we can't? Is it a question of eyesight, better eyesight, or more dexterity?

Does it come from all this wood carving tradition? And of course, it's nothing to do with this. The real answer, which I didn't give them, the real answer is that it is a question of politics. And that is what it really is. Because when you really come to think about it, to re-attach four fingers takes about seventeen or eighteen hours' hard work. And when you've done the operation, it's quite likely that one of the veins will block up and then you'll have to get out of

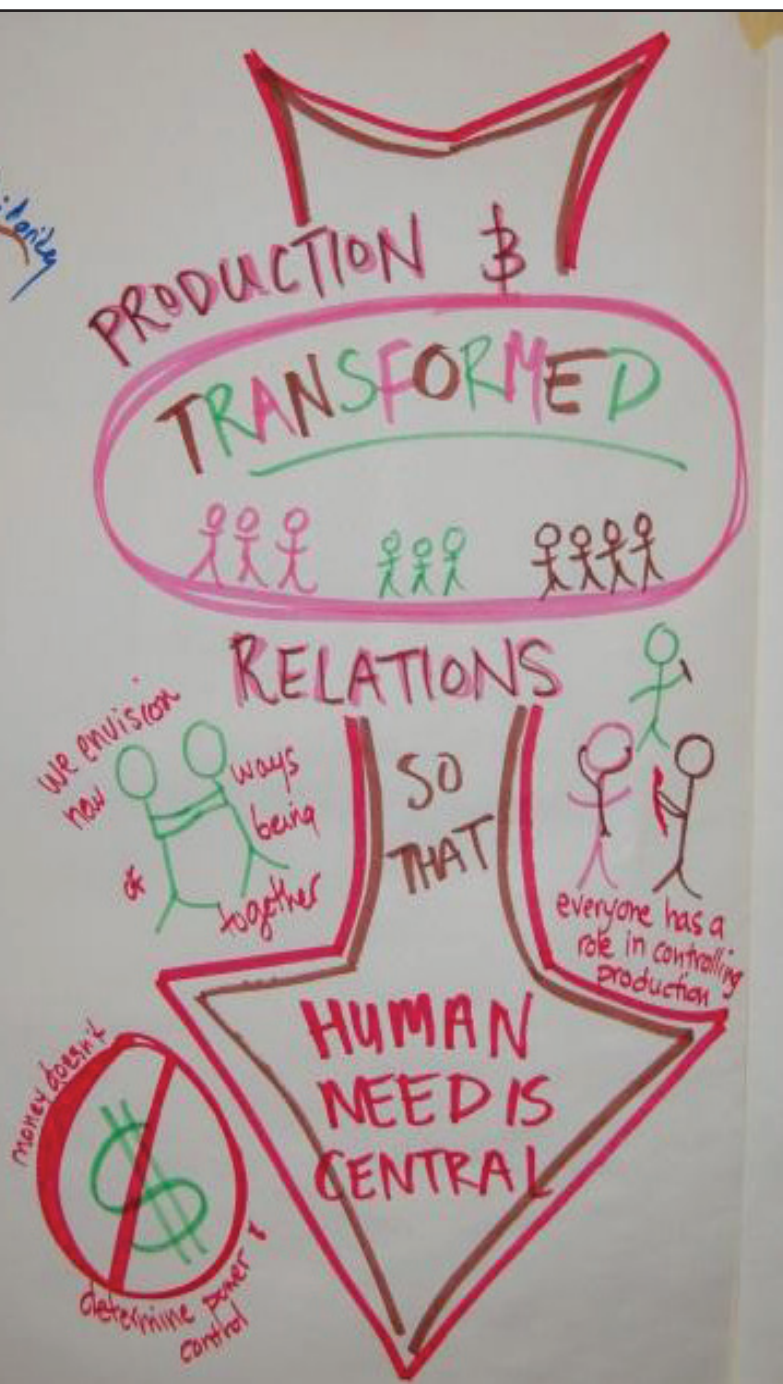
bed and do another four or five or six hours' work. You've got to have tremendous tenacity, tremendous patience, tremendous confidence, a tremendous desire for it to succeed, in order to do it. Where does this come from? It doesn't come from any conventional reward, because there isn't any. Doctors in China are never paid by their patients. They get a fixed salary and you get the same whether or not you have re-attached severed limbs. That makes no difference. Neither is it fame. Because this is a teamwork job and no one person is singled out as the number one. So it's not fame and it's not fortune. So what is it? It's a desire to serve the people. It's a desire to build up socialist China. It's a desire to transform the sick man of Asia into the most healthy man in the world. And that's politics.

-Joshua Horn, *Ibid*

#### THE WHOLE FIST = THE PARTY AND THE MASS ORGANIZATION

This means that the political will of the people is the driving force of mass work; but to strike with a whole fist the fingers of mass work need revolutionary unity. In this way the mass work and the political party are inseparable – a synthesis – a whole; we need unity of the mass and the party to strike with our whole fist. My own experiences include struggles with welfare recipients who occupied welfare offices to demand an increase in welfare rates, with a mass democratic organization fighting for expansion of public services, and militant struggles of mothers and childcare workers to demand childcare for all and an end to the super-exploitative temporary foreign domestic worker program; but what was missing in all of these struggles, which would have seen our mass leaders more effectively through the inevitable difficult times of retraction and losses, is the revolutionary party. A revolutionary party and a greater dialectical materialist orientation would have helped in synthesis, reflection and learning; a revolutionary party with a longer term perspective would have held leaders together through difficult times.

On the flip side, I look around me and I see many of our communist brothers and sisters dispersed, isolated, and lacking any mass base. Communists are not revolutionaries when separated from mass struggle.





**THE WHOLE FIST =  
COLLECTIVE POWER OF THE MASSES HELD TOGETHER**

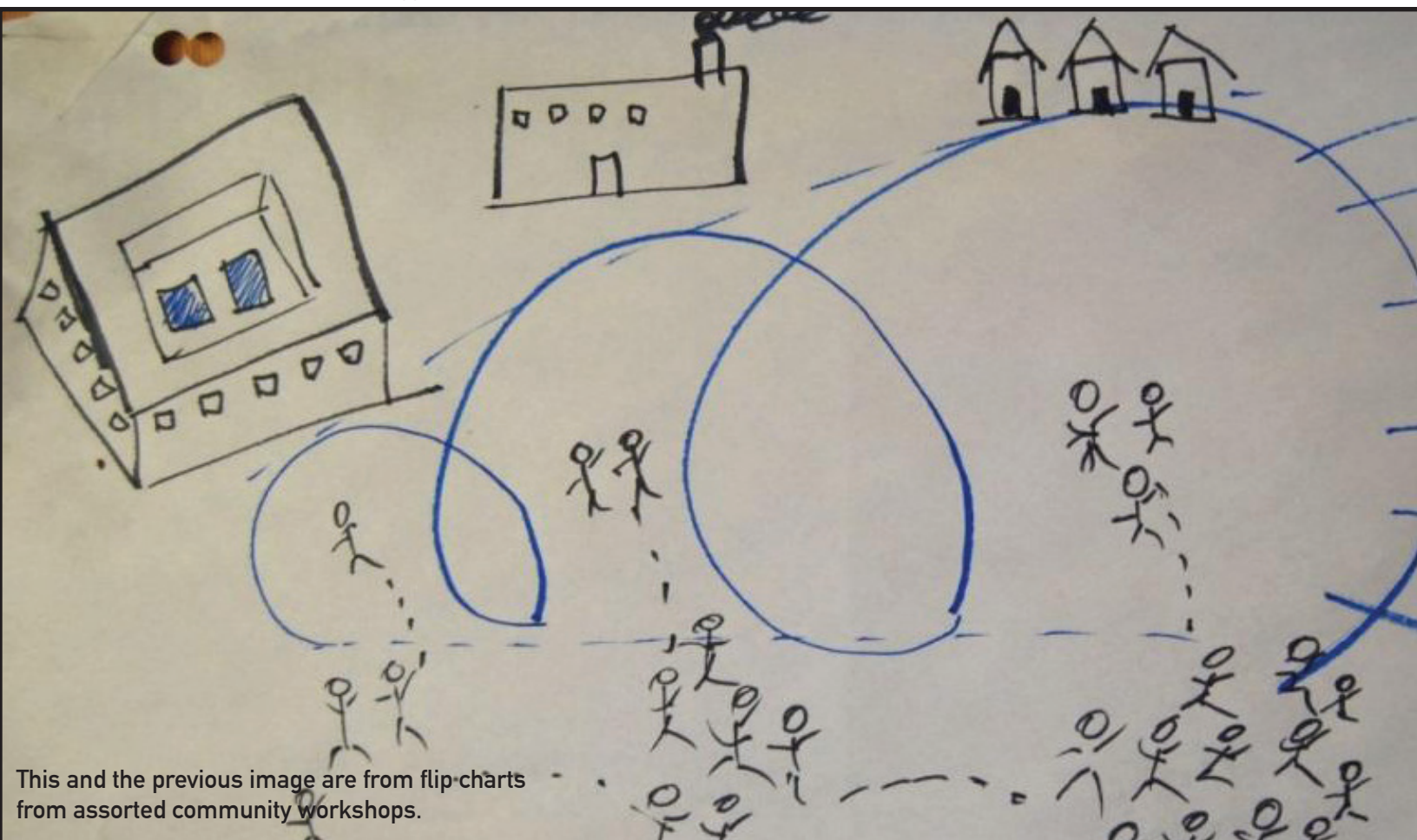
Another meaning of striking with the whole fist is to consistently build the collective power of the working class and the exploited and oppressed through democratic formations. The mass line is so much deeper than any single campaign or fight or struggle – all of these things can be contained within the mass line, but the mass line is greater than the sum of these parts.

The place to start is by working towards building democratic mass formations with leadership from the main forces of the working class and oppressed sectors. The mass line document of the Communist Party of the Philippines is a good overview on organizing communities along the mass line, although it is essential for organizers in the imperialist countries to work through application in our vastly differing contexts.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Communist Party of the Philippines on the Mass Line, available on the massline website maintained by Scott H: <http://massline.info/Philippines/masswork.htm>. Also read many of the documents available on the CPP/NPA website, such as: [http://www.philippinerevolution.net/statements/20120602\\_on-the-immediate-tasks-of-communists-and-their-struggle-for-socialism](http://www.philippinerevolution.net/statements/20120602_on-the-immediate-tasks-of-communists-and-their-struggle-for-socialism).

What holds the working class back from taking action to achieve liberation and to end our exploitation? We need the will to fight – and where does that will come from, and how can will be sustained?<sup>9</sup> These are critical questions. Breaking down alienation and isolation and tapping the creative force of the masses

<sup>9</sup> I recently read an interesting pamphlet by The Institute for Precarious Consciousness entitled “We Are All Very Anxious”. This pamphlet struck a chord with me, as I have witnessed that generalized anxiety is a common working class experience. Indeed, about many physical ailments I encounter I find myself pondering their psycho-social-structural origins. And of course, there is the shocking fact that 22% of middle-aged women in Canada are prescribed a psychiatric drug by their doctor. Although I know from my social investigation that anxiety is a lived reality, and from my Marxist class analysis that it is structural in origin and the economic benefits are reaped by Big Pharma, I have not fully comprehended how big of an impact this phenomena has on worker resistance. But it really makes sense. And the suggestion of The Institute of Precarious Consciousness to “construct disalienated space” could be powerful if contextualized within communist revolutionary mass line practice. In fact, isn’t breaking down alienation a good part of the power of the mass line?



This and the previous image are from flip-charts from assorted community workshops.



through generating new visions of the way things can be done can break the stranglehold of bourgeois ideology and help comrades be committed to the struggle for the long-term. Working class control over society is a vision we should all get to participate in deciding, not just a few leaders.

### THE POPULAR MASS LINE AND INSTITUTIONS OF WORKING CLASS POWER

Building mass-level international solidarity and promoting proletarian internationalism is important historical communist practice. Having cadre train and exchange with Marxist-Leninist-Maoist struggles internationally is critical for the development of revolution. This is not revolutionary tourism or voyeurism! On a great number of occasions it has been expressed to me by revolutionaries from a variety of struggles that the greatest contribution we can make to the revolutionary process in the oppressed and exploited nations is to take up anti-imperialist mass struggle within the imperialist countries. The class struggles of oppressed nationalities in the diaspora and as proletarian revolutionaries within a principled internationalism distract and weaken the bourgeoisie and gain footholds for revolutionaries in both the imperialist countries and in those countries where active revolutionary movements exist.

The movement in the Philippines has incredibly advanced mass line organizing. Mass organizations operate in a variety of social and economic sectors, and balance collectivizing individual and family needs and alleviating gross poverty and landlord exploitation with political consciousness-raising and mass-led campaigns to target big business and state corruption. Mao talks a great deal about the importance of step-by-step progress from serving the people, to mutual aid, to co-operatives, to collective ownership and control – far beyond the scope of this article – but worthy of consideration and study as a highly significant process.

The level of social investigation in the countryside and in urban poor communities is incredible. Ideological and political unity is built through participation in the Communist

Party, and leadership is tested in mass work. There exists a highly principled dialectical relationship between mass projects and the New People's Army (NPA): for 90% of army work is organizing and only 10% is military work. The people support the NPA; when defense of gains and land tenure is necessary, the NPA is a critical organization for defense of the people's economic and social interest.<sup>10</sup> The NPA holding landlords accountable to economic agreements with peasant farmers and defending land reclamations for collective farming. This was a direct contribution to economic, social, and physical well-being of the people; without the support of the peasant farmers and the agricultural workers, the NPA would serve questionable purpose. This dialectic interplay of mass and people's army is the foundation of revolutionary military work.<sup>11</sup>

In Gaza, Palestine, the political strength of mass organizations is consolidated through



**An image of an operating room in Al Awda Hospital in Gaza, Palestine.**

<sup>10</sup> For an excellent account of the impacts of war, and the juxtaposition of a just people's war, see: "Uncounted Lives: Children, Women, & Conflict in the Philippines. A Needs Assessment of Children and Women Affected by Armed Conflict" published by IBON Foundation.

<sup>11</sup> This interplay is also apparent in the documentary Red Ant Dream (see [www.redantdream.com](http://www.redantdream.com)).

collectivizing common needs and struggles through powerful institutions of people power, such as Al Awda Hospital. Of course the process of military defense is very different in Palestine, and while the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine does not consider itself a Maoist party, it has good examples of mass line practice.

There are a multitude of such examples and experiences to study and discuss in order to both strengthen our own revolutionary mass practice and to advance proletarian internationalism.

### TWO SPECIFIC COMMENTS ON REVOLUTIONARY INITIATIVE

Revolutionary Initiative has taken a bold step in initiating and experimenting with genuine mass practice. It was mass practice that drew me to Revolutionary Initiative, and in my years of participation my assessment of my own work has sharpened, my leadership capabilities strengthened, and my will to struggle has been refreshed. While mass practice has a tendency towards tailism and economism this is in part due to the general level of class struggle at this point in the history of communist movements in the imperialist countries. More study and reflection on the lived experiences of the Cultural Revolution and other historical and current revolutionary process will assist our cadres in advancing mass line practice with a revolutionary framework. I applaud the genuine mass-based and humble approach to mass practice of RI that seeks to balance revolutionary leadership with the lived experiences and expressed needs and desire of the working class and oppressed peoples.

Another strength that I have seen in RI is the principled relationship with the mass struggles of indigenous communities. My impression is this relationship can only deepen with engaged dialogue and the collective development of practice based on historical and structural commonalities of exploitation and oppression. There is no quick road in this process: false urgency will lead to errors. Communism requires shared vision and collective leadership, but collective leadership will emerge with time through political practice and not just through ideological exchange.

In conclusion, mass line practice is integral to both building the proletarian communist party and for effective military strategy, and perhaps most importantly it forms the foundation of the world we struggle to build.

There are no straight roads in the world; we must be prepared to follow a road that twists and turns and not try to get things on the cheap. It must not be imagined that one fine morning all the reactionaries will go down on their knees of their own accord. In a word, while the prospects are bright, the road has twists and turns. There are still many difficulties ahead that we must not overlook. By uniting with the entire people in a common effort, we can certainly overcome all difficulties and win victory.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Mao Zedong, October 17, 1945, "On the Chungking Negotiations": [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4\\_06.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4_06.htm).

# THE PEDAGOGY OF PARTY-BUILDING

*Reflections on communist leadership development  
in light of Freire, Gramsci, and Mao*

by Comrade Amil K.

Early 2015

Brazilian popular educator of peasants and workers, Paulo Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.



## PREFACE

A major internal assessment of leadership development practices in our organization has prompted me to revisit with a fresh set of eyes some of the ideas on pedagogy and party-building that I began to discuss two years back in my essays on Gramsci and Mao (“Towards the War of Position: Gramsci in Continuity and Rupture with Marxism-Leninism” from *Uprising* Volume #4).

Comrades within and outside our organization seemed to find some merit in that document, and I believe the following essay advances the project of reading Antonio Gramsci in light of Mao Zedong. However, in this piece, I explore Brazilian popular educator Paulo Freire’s ideas on *pedagogical praxis* to flesh out the Maoist concept of mass line and Gramsci’s ideas on party leadership. This

essay is heavily informed by and reflects RI’s experiences in party-building in its first phase of development, 2007-2013, and in the region in which it was founded, Southern Ontario i.e. the ancestral and/or present-day territories of the Haudenosaunee, Wendat, and Mississauga peoples.

## INTRODUCTION:

### A CRITICAL LOOK AT PAST LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES IN R.I.

At a series of meetings of the RI Central Committee in 2014, one of the overarching discussions that played out concerned the state that our organization had found itself in as a result of underdeveloped or ineffective training, education, and leadership development mechanisms. What we were confronted with in 2014 was an organization that began to face



serious obstacles to further growth, and had in fact had begun to contract. Paradoxically, we found ourselves in this situation at a moment when we in fact we faced a rising number of potential recruits around us that we weren't capable of leading. Our previous work had successfully created an interest in revolutionary organization. The problem, however, was our inability to consolidate our members, or reproduce leadership: that is, make them into effective organizers and provide them with the ideological, political, and organization training to organize, recruit, lead, and train others.

Internally, we had a disproportionate number of rank-and-file members to cadre (i.e. politically more advanced comrades, more precise meaning given below) and no established or effective means and institutions to develop recruits into cadre. Our inability to do this meant that we faced challenges in reproducing leadership. Basically, we faced a crisis of leadership from top to bottom. By this I mean, from top to bottom, or from the core to the periphery of the organization, the actual abilities of our members to provide some form of ideological, political, and organizational guidance and direction to others, inside or outside of R.I., was limited. So we hit a wall.

And as I'll expand upon further below, I believe the key ingredient that was missing from our leadership development methods – absent from the core to the periphery of our organizational reach – was a **pedagogical praxis**.<sup>1</sup>

In the past, we didn't effectively train our comrades in the art of agitation, consciousness-raising, ideological struggle, and effective criticism and self-criticism.<sup>2</sup> We recruited

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1 I should clarify that the generalizations about our past work pertain to RI in its general trajectory as an organization since its origins and up until approximately late 2013, but does not account for the political experiences of comrades who have been more recently united with R.I. and contributed to R.I.'s development from other regions.

2 By effective criticism and self-criticism (CSC), I mean a practice of CSC that actually got down to the ideological basis of incorrect attitudes, behaviours, and styles of work to bring about ideological remolding and inspire rectification and transformation of comrades. Often, we delivered criticisms as rebuke and less inspired by revo-

lutionary love, and thus we lacked the follow-through to support our comrades in pushing through with personal transformation to become more committed revolutionaries. In a word, our CSC practices were lacking in pedagogy.

people not on the basis of their capacity to organize and lead, but rather on the basis of (1) an interest in Marxism-Leninism-Maoism (not always as clear and conscious as it needed to be) and perhaps also (2) the energy and consistency of their activity – and I mean this pejoratively – in the *activism* that R.I. members were involved in. We thought that somehow the rest would just follow. Well it didn't.

Ironically, a principled reason why our founding members didn't join the PCR-RCP in 2006 was due to a skepticism of joining a Maoist organization on the basis of a nominal adherence to a program without effective and practical experiences in mass line organizing. So instead of joining the PCR-RCP, we embedded ourselves in sections of the masses and amidst mass struggles. However, when confronted with predictable challenges in mass organizing, rather than persevering and refining our methods in the mass organization of the proletariat, we became increasingly preoccupied with the recruits that we were able to attract by *merely* being embedded with and agitating amongst the masses. But that's not the same as saying that we were effectively advancing mass struggle.

All this to say that when we recruited comrades to R.I., it was not necessarily on the basis of their demonstrated capacity to develop, cultivate, or lead people's struggles. Rather, as I said immediately above, it was on the basis of some consistency in their activism and an interest in Maoism.

So why couldn't our founding core of RI members not effectively reproduce its leadership? The context of weak leadership development practices by our first generation of leadership in RI is one in which effectively no one in that period of the organization had the benefit of much training and careful guidance by elder revolutionary communists. Our founding core did make efforts to learn from and expose ourselves to some of the most advanced revolutionary movements in the world today – coupled of course with our

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lutionary love, and thus we lacked the follow-through to support our comrades in pushing through with personal transformation to become more committed revolutionaries. In a word, our CSC practices were lacking in pedagogy.

book study of past experiences. But these exposures, direct and indirect, still left us with the heavy weight of having to self-orient and strategize for our own context. And this is a burden that revolutionaries anywhere will face where a connection to previous generations of attempts at revolutionary struggle have been severed.

Learning from revolutionary movements around the world was one of the most vital things we did as an upstart revolutionary organization. Second to that, and also essential, was embedding ourselves amongst the proletarian masses – which had the greatest boost on our morale, unity, and determination. But the disconnect between being revolutionary communists and effective mass organizers, I now believe, was to be found in how we conceived of and conducted revolutionary education and ideological struggle.

For RI comrades and other revolutionary activists, we'd drop some Mao and communist classics on comrades, RI literature, etc., but it'd really only hit people on the head most of the time. Maoism was almost never met with aversion, but that didn't quite mean there was uptake and synthesis either. Our methods, I think, were a little too close to book worship. And I say this without in the least bit discounting the importance of building up the ability and confidence of comrades to engage with the written word of "the classics," and with a strong emphasis on how significant I believe the introduction of Maoism has been to the resolve, commitment, and outlook of our comrades. The problem has been in forms of education that have been missing.

To be sure, we'd engage deeply in mass organizing, campaigning, and alliance work, but in these we often lacked a process of theorizing our practice, of deep assessment and evaluation. Not because it wasn't seen as important, but because we, in the standard mode of activism we were caught up in, we often let "the work" drive us, we let ourselves become dictated by external factors, and we became swayed by circumstances. Mass work would often predominate over party work, and the impulse to "get things done" would often predominate over building people up as revolutionaries or even ask what the point was of the work we were doing. All in all, this meant

that the relationship of theory to practice was often weak.

But this is beginning to change.

### THEORIZING OUR PRACTICE

The moment things really began to shift in RI – and this is a noteworthy event – was the moment that one of our first major debates opened up within the organization, which forced members to merge revolutionary communist theory with their life experiences. This was the series of studies and debate on women's liberation initiated by Comrade Stella, which has engaged virtually the entire organization and has been the engine in consolidating and strengthening our membership. That the debate on women's liberation happened to arise in the midst of a crisis of leadership in the organization may have been a coincidence,<sup>3</sup> but the progress of this debate had a lot to do with the consolidation of the organization and very deep and critical examination of our past leadership development practices. How? Because the moment we began to deeply engage and theorize people's lived experiences – particularly around the super-exploitation and oppression of proletarian women – we saw a boom in member engagement in the organization and a very significant rise in women's leadership.

For years, almost since our inception, the Central Committee had been setting goals for increasing women's membership and leadership in the organization. We saw the lack of women's leadership in the organization as a problem that we urgently needed to solve. Very early on, women in the organization identified our analysis of patriarchy and women's liberation as woefully inadequate, and that this inadequacy would keep us from recruiting or developing revolutionary women. But as soon as we began to seriously engage the experiences of women with revolutionary communism, and with the assistance of Comrade Stella's ideological interventions, women's participation and leadership in the

<sup>3</sup> As one can see from Comrade Jameel's article in this issue, a critical examination of our methods was already at play by late 2013 / early 2014, around the same time we were going to prioritize the ideological struggle around women's liberation, but not before it had actually arose.

organization dramatically shifted. This shift occurred as soon as women in the organization and in its immediate orbit saw RI begin to actually theorize and seriously prioritize the tasks of organizing around proletarian women's concerns and prioritizing their political leadership in revolutionary struggle. Not as a tokenistic gesture, but as a strategic necessity given our emergent class analysis regarding the super-exploitation of proletarian women in the imperialist world system and the necessity of their leadership for revolution and the advance of class struggle within socialist society.

Now, the debate that consolidated our organization in its time of crisis could have very well been something else. As massively significant and needed that the debate on women's liberation was, it could have been national oppression (which is our next major ideological-political priority). The point I am making is that our organization surged forward the moment our members carefully scrutinized

their lived experiences through the lens of revolutionary communism, therein discovering the words and concepts to arm themselves in the struggle, differentiate friends from enemies, and advance with greater confidence as revolutionaries. In other words, learning and education in RI made a huge leap forward when we overcame book worship and activism and began to develop an internal **pedagogical praxis**.<sup>4</sup> And we're now faced with the tasks of developing the internal institutions by which each and every one of our members can develop their capacity to engage in pedagogical exchanges (which I define further below). This is the key to strengthening leadership in the organization. It's not a question of how many theoreticians we have, or the "prowess" of Central Committee members, as Comrade Pierce recently pointed out in an internal intervention. It's about the strength of collective leadership in the organization, and the sinews that bind our collectivity must in large part be an effective pedagogy.

We're now faced with the work of encouraging each and every one of our comrades to examine their actual leadership capacities and to identify what they need to do to become more effective leaders. Each of us needs to be able to answer questions like, "How many people look to me for leadership?" and "Who do I look to for leadership?"

What matters right now – at a moment



Issue #5 of Uprising. The moment we began to theorize the super-exploitation of proletarian women and the necessity of women's liberation and women's leadership for the advance of class struggle under socialism, was the moment we began to develop an internal pedagogical praxis within R.I.

4 Two comrades provided me with feedback on this paragraph that I would like to document, and which I find compatible with my statement on *pedagogical praxis*. One comrade pointed out that formal processes, like a pedagogical praxis, are inextricably bound up with the content of the exchange. So we should be cautious about emphasizing *process/form* over *content*. Another comrade raised an important point that struggles sometimes occur in the realm of philosophy and/or outside of our direct experiences that can have a huge impact on the direction of a revolutionary party. For instance, the coup in China in 1976 and how those developments were understood by parties around the world. Or take as another example the significance of Mao's *On Contradiction*. Written in August 1937, this text was intended to correct dogmatic thinking in the CCP, as well as overcoming serious problems in Soviet policy and Stalin's conception of dialectical materialism. In short, line struggles can take place around questions outside of our direct experiences.



when the development of cadre will be crucial for launching a Party and maintaining the initiative in accumulating revolutionary forces – is that every comrade has a correct sense of their own current capacities and what they need to do to advance as revolutionaries. This means that they know who looks to them for leadership, and they need to begin leading those people in a revolutionary direction. They also need to know who they need to look to for guidance in their journey to improve their revolutionary leadership. Revolutionary leadership is not principally about command or authority – how we think of “leaders” in bourgeois society. It’s about taking responsibility for the mentorship and guidance of those entering class struggle or R.I., as well as having the humility to know when to turn to other comrades for guidance and direction.

The picture I’ve painted of our organization may leave one wondering just what the hell were leaders in our organization actually doing, if not training, mentoring, educating, and guiding the membership?

Well, instead of doing these things, I think that our leadership was often way too caught up in the nuts and bolts of activism – and I draw a distinction here between activism and being immersed in mass struggle amongst the people. There was frankly a lot of *uber-activism* that got rendered as “leading by good example.” Many of our leading members were extraordinarily active, were juggling multiple organizational responsibilities, and were trying to provide leadership to far too many people than any of us were actually able to sufficiently mentor and do the due diligence that was required to develop new revolutionaries. We were more activists in the worst sense of the word than we would have ever admitted or even recognized at that time: We organized more things than we organized people. We engaged in extensive propaganda, built organizations and alliances, launched campaigns, held countless events, many rallies and mobilizations. In the best of times we were even engaged in mass organizing that extended our contact far, far beyond the reach of the mass organizations we were involved in. And so areas of work would and did collapse like a house of cards any time a leading member wasn’t able to hold it down any longer. Let’s

face it: people burn out, get dispirited, and give up, but these tendencies are strongest where there is a lop-sidedness in leadership and general membership. Sometimes what we considered to be our mass work was like blowing frantically into a balloon, only to have the air come out the other end once those doing the blowing lost their breath. Ultimately, what we lacked was a strong and dynamic organization of revolutionary cadre. Why? Because we often sacrificed our party development to the development of our mass organizations, and the party work we did undertake was too disconnected from it. Our party-building organization wasn’t mining our experiences in mass struggle for important lessons. We were recruiting from our mass work without learning through it. Thus, our party development *and* our mass work lagged.

To reiterate once again before I expand further below, the missing factor was a solid pedagogy. If we weren’t learning from our experiences in mass struggle, it’s because we just weren’t paying close enough attention, we weren’t investigating the problems we faced with due attention. A pedagogical praxis is really at the core of the mass line method of organizing and the task of building up revolutionary cadre out of mass struggle. Paolo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* offers some important insights on the pedagogical praxis of party-building, especially when read alongside Gramsci and Mao.

#### FREIRE’S CONCEPT OF ‘PEDAGOGICAL PRAXIS’

While Paolo Freire’s simplistic division of the world into ‘oppressors’ and ‘oppressed’ suffers from a lack of nuance in its conception of class as well as a lack of a deeper consideration of how class relates to national oppression and patriarchy, there are nonetheless quite valuable principles concerning liberatory education that revolutionary communists should study closely and which I have not found expressed as sharply elsewhere in communist literature. And if these ideas are out there somewhere buried in annals of our history and the lesser-known theorists of revolution, they certainly don’t have the currency that Freire’s ideas do. Finally, there is a revolutionary essence to Freire’s educational methods that





elaborate beyond a couple footnotes on how his theories of education relate to the mass line (which Maoists across the world at least nominally acknowledge as a pillar of Maoism, even if it's not always clear that there's much disagreement on what the mass line means practically).

So dialogue is at the core of pedagogical praxis and Mao's mass line contains an entire dialogical theory to it. It can't be emphasized strongly enough that a dialogue is NOT just one person talking to another. A communist organizer must always be conscious of the opposing dangers of talking too much (preaching) or not at all (as if we're empty vessels waiting to be filled by the masses). A revolutionary with a program has much to teach the people, and also much to learn. Moving a subject's consciousness along a revolutionary trajectory requires attentive listening and intervening where people can be moved in a revolutionary direction. When we engage in agitation, in listening attentively to what the people have to say, we first determine whether the reactionary or the revolutionary elements of one's consciousness predominate; second, we engage with the contradictions in one's consciousness to push them along a

revolutionary trajectory; and third, we seek to identify where people can be pushed into practical struggle on the basis of their positive ideas. Conscious participation in mass struggle, when guided by critical reflection, is where one's consciousness makes leaps in a revolutionary direction. This can only come through an active dialogue. The necessarily critical and reflective participation of the masses in revolutionary struggle is sharply distinguished from how they are treated in bourgeois society:

Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated.<sup>7</sup>

Isn't this just another way of saying that the conscious role of the masses is decisive in revolution, which we Maoists recognize as pretty foundational to our view of the world? So what's the difference between pedagogical leadership and demagogic leadership? Freire believes that the revolutionary process is far more the former than the latter: "The object in presenting these considerations is to defend the eminently pedagogical character of the

<sup>7</sup> Freire, 65.



This famous painting by Soviet painter Isaak Brodsky (1883-1939) artistically renders one of the many scenes of Lenin speaking to a crowd of workers. Whatever the place of such charismatic moments in a revolutionary process, they are few and far between in comparison to the day-to-day tasks of revolutionary work. Do images like this leave us with a distorted impression of what revolutionary consciousness-raising looks like? Do enshrining moments like these run the risk of promoting demagoguery and downplaying pedagogy in a revolutionary movement?



revolution.”<sup>8</sup>

“The only effective instrument is a humanizing pedagogy in which the revolutionary leadership establishes a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed. In a humanizing pedagogy the method ceases to be an instrument by which the teachers (in this instance, the revolutionary leadership) can manipulate the students (in this instance, the oppressed), because it expresses the consciousness of the students themselves.”<sup>9</sup>

Okay comrades, so maybe it’s time we take down those posters of Lenin, Mao, Chavez or whoever, giving riling speeches to the masses. To be sure, figures like Lenin and Chavez were incredibly skilled orators: their monologues were filled with the experiences and concerns of the masses. But grand monologues simply aren’t what revolutionary leadership looks like 99.9% of the time. Virtually all of our time is engaged in the development of revolutionary consciousness, consciousness that must lead to action and which advances by correctly summing up the results of our actions.

As with demagogy, so too in propaganda, wherein Freire identifies the critical lack of dialogue:

The revolutionary leader must realize that their own conviction of the necessity for struggle... was not given to them by anyone else – if it is authentic. This conviction cannot be packaged and sold.... Likewise, the oppressed (who do not commit themselves to the struggle unless they are convinced, and who, if they do not make such a commitment, withhold the indispensable

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 69. It’s unfortunate that Freire resorts to philosophical notions of humanism in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which were resurgent in the 1960s and 1970s and expanding in lock-step with the influence of the revisionist trends in Marxism. Althusser criticized the reappropriation of humanist concepts by Marxists or communists in his 1964 essay *Marxism and Humanism*. The humanist underpinnings of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* are one of its major shortcomings, which has left the notion of pedagogy quite open to the individualistic conceptions of “liberation” that post-modernists and other liberals have seized upon. In any case, I do not believe that this shaky philosophical underpinning to Freire’s work detracts from the core insights of Freire’s reflections on the process of bringing out revolutionary consciousness.

conditions for this struggle) must reach this conviction as Subjects, not as objects.... Propaganda cannot achieve this.<sup>10</sup>

This is a pretty significant statement, considering we communists are notorious for our propaganda. Freire is basically saying that dialogue is more important than or at least has primacy over propaganda:

The correct method for revolutionary leadership to employ in the task of liberation is, therefore, not ‘liberation propaganda’... The correct method lies in dialogue. The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own *conscientização*.<sup>11</sup>

Let’s not let the pendulum swing too far and scrap propaganda or speeches where those methods are the choice means of propagation. But what Freire is saying is that dialogue has to be at the core of building the revolution, and this principle resonates with the conscious role of the masses in the Chinese revolution that we have much to learn from. Let’s get into that a bit more.

For so long, we – and I include myself here – interpreted the old mass line dictum “*From the masses, to the masses*” as a method for developing solid propaganda, not how to have an actual conversation. In Comrade Stella B’s article “What is the Mass Line? Experiences and Reflections” in this issue of *Uprising*, she speaks to her own experiences in observing the un-dialectical application of the mass line:

Some revolutionary organizations interpret the application of mass line as putting out the best argument or line to sway the masses. But the mass line is a political, organizational, and ideological practice, not a slogan or mere political position. This un-dialectical approach of sloganeering will lead to errors and isolation. Some revolutionary organizations interpret the mass line as disseminating communist analysis to the masses through newspapers, party propaganda, and militant actions; this type of practice is a form of commandism. In my experience this only alienates communists and cuts us off from access to the main revolutionary forces of

<sup>10</sup> Freire, 67.

<sup>11</sup> There’s no English equivalent for this word, but if there was it would be *conscientization* and this would mean, to raise the consciousness of.

society.<sup>12</sup>

In my own experience, the inter-personal, the dialogical, essence of the mass line, has long been overshadowed by viewing the mass line as a process of developing good ideas that is cut-off from moving people's consciousness. Certainly, propaganda or a specific political call that has passed through some iterations of a mass line practice could be a good entry point for some critical dialogue. But alone, the propaganda is not enough: *it needs the active, conscious role of a skilled agitator.*

To start with a self-critical examination with my own past writings, in "Mass Work and Proletarian Revolutionaries" (Volume #2 of Uprising, 2012), I shared my view at the time that our organization "upholds the principle of the mass line... as being the highest and clearest articulation of the correct form of proletarian revolutionary leadership amongst the masses." I also pointed out that I believed that:

The collection of quotations from Mao Zedong on the mass line forms one of the richest [and most condensed] articulations of a revolutionary epistemology and pedagogy in the International Communist Movement...<sup>13</sup>

But while I already recognized some pedagogical content to Mao's mass line at the time, I didn't really grasp the essence of pedagogical praxis – nor did our organization as a whole. This pedagogical deficit is embodied in this passage:

If the communist is the teacher, then what s/he strives to teach is materialist dialectics and history and the strategic orientation for revolutionary struggle. But the mass line recognizes that one cannot teach revolutionary politics adequately without first being familiar with the conditions and experiences of the masses, and that knowing can only come by way of humbly learning from and being taught by the masses. Communist ideas are not neat little pre-packaged ideas that we just have to go out and disseminate amongst the people. The most important communist ideas, those that R.I. seeks to develop, are mass-lined communist ideas – ideas that have been substantially enriched by know-

ing and living the experiences of the people in all the specificity and particularity that is required to advance class struggle in any given place and time.

Here's the weakness of this formulation. It isn't as dialectical as it appears at first glance. I think this formulation makes it sound like the task of the communists working amongst the people is to simply gather social investigation, get to know what people are thinking and feeling, transfer these ideas into a process of producing propaganda, programs, and strategy for mass work. And we did a shit load of that in the course of our work. We returned a lot of ideas back to the people in the form of, well, "packaged ideas." Isn't this what we do when we produce "mass-lined propaganda", educational curricula, and organization programs? And this is necessary. Good "mass-lined propaganda" is important. But at an individual level, the above conception of the mass line falls short on account of actually engaging in the dialectics of consciousness-raising with people on a one-to-one basis. *It remains undialectical if our actual interactions with people do not consist of dialogue and critical reflection both in the first moments of contact and social investigation, and in later periods of returning with more developed propaganda and programs.*

So the mass line splits into two practices. In my experience, there's this dialectical mass line – which we're now trying to utilize and employ – and the undialectical one that failed to press our comrades to engage people's consciousness directly and dialogically.

In my own past practice of doing mass propaganda with comrades in proletarian neighbourhoods, there are these moments when you get pulled into someone's home for a long conversation about what's going on. Anyone who has done serious organizing knows that these interactions are what you wait for when knocking on dozens and dozens of doors. But sometimes this little conflict played out in our minds: "Damn, this conversation is so important, but I'm also sacrificing getting this fresh pamphlet here out to another 150 people. What do I do?"

This sort of internal dialogue, I can now see, reflected a confused or at least inadequate understanding of how communists should be

<sup>12</sup> Comrade Stella B., *Uprising* Issue #6 (Summer 2015), 12-20.

<sup>13</sup> Comrade Amil K., "Mass Work and Proletarian Revolutionaries," *Uprising* Volume #2 (2012), 10-19.

agitating, organizing, educating and learning. The problem wasn't the two hour conversation. That was gold! That's the sort of opportunity we should have been looking for. It's the chance to really explore what people are thinking, to find the most advanced people, and move them into class struggle – or even join them in struggle. Not every conversation will yield that. But it's only through these conversations that we'll find potential leaders and those interested or ready to engage in class struggle.

The problem is that we didn't have a clear idea of what should come out of those conversations, **because we had no clear, tried, and tested means of effectively organizing people.** As Freire says, pedagogical practice must be a problem-solving form of education, and it must be action-oriented. What was our plan for engaging the masses in action, in organizing for their own liberation? And if plans for action are not emerging from these sorts of conversations, if the idea and plans for action are coming entirely from outside these conversations, even if after extensive social investigation and contact building, then we've failed at dialectical education and our pedagogical practice will certainly suffer. Who was there to carry out the actions if these were not organically emerging from agitation amongst the masses? Who? Activists! And this is why we were more activists than mass organizers, despite our activism being more amongst the masses and even though we tried to distance ourselves from the more petty-bourgeois activist scenes.<sup>14</sup>

There's a contradiction between agitation through propaganda, on the one hand, and focused pedagogical praxis on the other, and I can now see that the latter needs to come first and be primary as communists begin undertaking focused mass work. The contradiction between agit-prop and critical dialogue is that the former is quick, momentary, and sweeps

<sup>14</sup> There are important discussions documents forthcoming later this year from R.I. that will elaborate upon questions of mass movement building, mass democratic organizing, the relation between the Party organization and the masses, and the principles of proletarian democracy. These documents will address past errors and weaknesses, while clarifying our views on these questions moving forward.

over a wider area, and the latter is focused, deeply engaging, and takes a lot more time. They are complimentary, they are two aspects of a contradiction, and their relative importance may flip from moment to moment. For example, if you're advertising an action that may be taking place soon, then the agit-prop is going to be primary and you're not going to have a lot of time for critical dialogue with everyone person you see. But if you're in a phase of organizing people and building an organization, pedagogical practice is primary and the two-hour conversations are exactly what you're looking for. It's in critical dialogue that we get to know each other, begin to develop trust for one another, and work through the tangle of oppressive versus liberatory ideas – bourgeois/liberal versus proletarian revolutionary ideas. And if we can – *and we must* – pinpoint and leverage what Mao called the "advanced ideas" in these conversations into political action, and if out of these conversations we get people to rally, recruit, and engage others, then we're discovering, bringing out, organizing those "advanced masses" Mao instructed as being necessary to bring together for the success of mass struggle.

Beyond the mass struggle, for revolutionaries, dialogue is also extremely significant for sustaining and refreshing the consciousness of revolutionaries. A "revolutionary" who isn't having critical dialogues about struggle and revolution with a wide range of oppressed and exploited people on a regular basis runs the risk of dogmatism in the short run. And in the long run, one runs the risk of altogether abandoning these revolutionary communist ideas if years of dogmatic practice leaves one isolated. Mao's principle that "We must have faith in the masses" becomes a tenet of blind faith with no material basis if we are not routinely validating that belief, and one may find oneself beginning to question the principle altogether if one is not deeply and routinely engaged in the development of the consciousness of the masses. It's not a far journey for the dogmatist to arrive at that place where s/he begins to blame oppressed and exploited people for the situation they're in because he, the dogmatist, failed to advance revolutionary organization.

By having "faith in the masses," of course,



we must be discerning. The science of revolution, our class analysis, our strategy and tactics, all help us separate out good ideas from bad ideas, “advanced” ideas from reactionary ones. This is why we require the Leninist Party. As Mao says,

The leaders must... be skilled in uniting the small number of active elements around the leadership and must rely on them to raise the level of the intermediate elements and to win over the backward elements.<sup>15</sup>

But how else can we identify who the “advanced” are if not through pedagogical conversations?

### BOURGEOIS METHODS OF EDUCATION

Another way to grasp the notion of *pedagogical praxis* is to understand what it is not. The revolutionary form of education is sharply contrasted with the form of education employed by the ruling class and its functionaries, by virtually all the institutions of bourgeois society. Because these are the methods through which we learn much of what we know growing up in capitalist society, it’s not surprising that it’s the default method by which a lot of upstart revolutionaries educate one another and attempt to educate the masses with.

The bourgeois form of education is what Freire called the *banking model of education*, a model wherein “education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositors and the teacher is the depositor” (Freire 72). Why this is the form by which the ruling class propagates its ideas is pretty plain to see. When you’re trying to deny, dismiss, ignore, obscure, and negate the lived experiences of the masses and if your education methods cement one’s sense of alienation and oppression within it, you just can’t leave people with much room to engage critically and dialogue. Critical consciousness must be repressed. Questioning one’s social circumstances must be repressed. Unfortunately, many revolutionaries emulate these methods: That is, we study books more than we study the lived experiences of the people, we *teach* without *learning*, we *talk* without *listening*, we *monologue*

15 Mao Zedong (June 1, 1943), “Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership,” in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, Vol. III), 118.

without *dialogue*.<sup>16</sup>

Freire is damn on point when he says that the purpose of revolutionary education is to resolve the contradiction between the teacher and the student. And let’s not be embarrassed about this contradiction. There’s nothing more natural in this world than a contradiction: *the unity of opposites*. The movement of *all things* is propelled by contradiction. Communists are principally teachers in relation to the masses. But – *and this is a big BUT*– there are many moments when relating to someone who is not in the communist party – *let’s say a recruit, or a member of a mass organization, or someone amongst the unorganized masses* – wherein we are primarily students. These are the moments wherein we listen intently, ask questions that help us understand that person’s situation, check our understanding of the situation, and critically engage someone’s understanding of reality. This attentiveness is essential to rearrange the scattered and incoherent ideas of the masses and pull out those “advanced ideas” we mass-line Maoists talk so much about. This is how the mass line becomes a living, breathing practice. As Freire said, “liberating education consists of acts of cognition, not transfers of information.”<sup>17</sup>

The closing of this gap between the teacher and student – between the communist and her interlocuter – is really the elevation of that someone into an increasingly conscious participant of the class struggle or revolutionary struggle. And this is where the discussion on pedagogy meets its limitations in the absence of the question of the revolutionary Party.

By way of a preface to the next section of this essay, it is worth saying that dialogical exchange / critical dialogue / pedagogical praxis is emotionally and intellectually very intensive for the two interlocutors. So if we’re talking about communists in imperialist countries who are going to be people who need to get up in the morning and go chase after a wage, then there’s going to be a strict limitation to how many people any one communist can really dialogue with in the course of a week. So again, we need

16 Another danger with bourgeois methods of education is “building a great wall” between ourselves and the people (p.15), which is addressed in Stella B.’s article “What is the Mass Line?” in this issue of *Uprising*.

17 Freire, 79.

to explore the question of an unfolding pedagogical praxis to the larger question of the Party and its expanding leadership capacities (which really comes down to the numbers and quality of cadre, as I'll expand upon further below).

I believe that we find answers to these problems by exploring some of the qualities of members and levels of leadership that we find within such a revolutionary organization and movement. Enter Gramsci, left of stage...

### **“GENERALS”, CADRE, AND RANK-AND-FILE: CONCEPTIONS OF COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP IN GRAMSCI’S THOUGHT**

Antonio Gramsci argued that for the Communist Party to come into being, three types of members must converge: what he called the mass element, the intermediate element, and the principal cohesive element. Now, we must remember that Gramsci’s historical moment was one where communist parties had membership numbers in the thousands, if not tens of thousands, and in his unique historical moment, these three types of membership coalesced like filings to a magnet.

The collapse of the Second International during the first major inter-imperialist world war and the complete bankruptcy of the Social Democratic parties signaled an historical rupture in socialism, a split in Marxism, and the emergence of Marxism-Leninism and the Communist Party as the phase of consolidating the revolutionary experiences of the proletariat. After 1914, millions of proletarians across Europe hardened by the war, exposed to two generations of class struggle, and disenchanted from the social democratic parties were up for grabs. So this was the historical context within which the three types of members Gramsci identifies could very rapidly coalesce. It was a context where dozens -- *maybe even hundreds* -- of cadre could be assembled into a revolutionary party, which by today’s tempo of revolutionary growth appears to us like a lightning flash. Let us not be blind to the potentiality that such moments of historical rupture will return, but this is clearly not the context of communist organizing today at least in the imperialist countries. But Gramsci’s schema of a party remains useful, in any case, for elucidating the qualities of leadership

within a party and the relations among them.<sup>18</sup>

Fusing some of Gramsci’s language with our own contemporary political nomenclature, I will refer to these segments of the Party respectively for the moment as rank-and-file, cadre, and what Gramsci metaphorically refers to as the “Generals” I will call the leading cadre. Let’s explore how Gramsci characterized these various elements of the Party, and examine the merits of these concepts for shedding light on the question of leadership development within revolutionary organization for our times.

### **RANK-AND-FILE: ‘THE MASS ELEMENT’**

The mass element is the base of the Party. By the way Gramsci characterizes this layer of the Party, it would seem like it is the main interface between the Party and the masses, if not in qualitative terms certainly in quantitative terms. Gramsci believed the “mass element” of the Party to consist of

Ordinary, average men [sic], whose participation takes the form of discipline and loyalty, rather than any creative or organizational spirit... They are a force in so far as there is somebody to centralise, organise, and discipline them. In the absence of a cohesive force, they would scatter into an impotent diaspora and vanish into nothing (Gramsci [1930-32], Selections from the *Prison Notebooks*, 152).

Some may cringe – perhaps those of us with a little anarchist part of our hearts or minds – at the idea of a rank-and-file scattering so quickly upon the dissolution of a leadership structure. Anyone who questions this formulation needs only reflect upon the examples we have from history where upon the elimination of the leading cadre of the movement and/or or significant portion of the intermediate level of cadre, parties rapidly disintegrated. The Black Panther Party was

<sup>18</sup> The absence of development of all three elements in our own internal structure is among the reasons why we have remained a party-building organization, and not a Party. Too many organizations are quick to proclaim themselves a ‘Party’ without actually satisfying important criteria to live up to the name, thereby substituting appearance for essence. See our “Preconditions for Building a Genuine Communist Party,” *The Theoretical Journal of Revolutionary Initiative Volume 1: 2006-2009*.

effectively neutralized by the mid 1970s when much of its leading ideological and political figures were killed, imprisoned, or driven into exile. Certainly, internal ideological contradictions played a significant role in the destruction of the Panthers and ruled out a recovery of the Party from the FBI's war on the black liberation movement. In any event, we have a case in point that the FBI didn't and couldn't kill the thousands of members and tens of thousands of supporters – the rank-and-file of the Party. What they succeeded in doing was repressing and dividing the organization's cadre and "generals."

Or in Canada, we have the example of the Workers' Communist Party, which rapidly dissolved, almost overnight, after its leadership basically self-liquidated in the early 1980s. This is an organization that had under its leadership no less than hundreds of revolutionary communists, maybe thousands; and a mass movement it led running into the tens of thousands. As the oral tradition I have come across would tell it, it was liquidated literally overnight in Quebec after francophone leaders in the party were able to effect a liquidation of the organization, exploiting the fact that the leadership of the Party was heavily anglophone and that it did not support the independence vote in Quebec's 1982 failed referendum. It is noteworthy that it took two decades for the reemergence of anything resembling a revolutionary communist organization in Canada after the WCP's dissolution, which took the form of RCP-Canada starting in the early 2000s, and RI shortly thereafter.<sup>19</sup>

There's also the example of the Indonesian Communist Party in 1965, which not only faced a murderous liquidation of its leadership, but a full-out fascist onslaught against all leftists that claimed as many as 1-2 million of its members and supporters. Fifty years later, revolutionary forces in Indonesia have only just recently begun to re-emerge.

Gramsci concedes that "admittedly, any of these [rank-and-file] elements might become a cohesive force" down the road. But he is referring to them at the moment when the rank-and-file is precisely just that.

<sup>19</sup> Remnants of the WCP regrouped in the 1990s into Accion Socialiste, the pre-cursor to the PCR-RCP.

By contrast, the Bolsheviks after 1905, the Chinese Communist Party after 1927, and the Communist Party of the Philippines virtually since its inception all hold out strong illustrations of how a revolutionary party *can* pull through intense bouts of repression if its leadership structure and a significant layer of cadre remain intact, if it remains united with a clear and viable program for proletarian revolution, and if it remains embedded in the masses. In spite of the setbacks all of these parties experienced in the course of their development, from line struggles and splits to fierce repression, they advanced. I am not going to deny that objective conditions *were* fertile for revolutionary growth in Russia, China, and the Philippines in their own times and places. But were they not also for the Black liberation movement in the U.S. or for communists in Indonesia?<sup>20</sup>

So what we can glean from Gramsci's schema is that the "mass element" is the mass base, the majority of the party. It doesn't principally lead the party strategically or ideologically, but it plays the significant part in the construction of the institutions of proletarian revolutionary power.

So what is the significance and role of the

<sup>20</sup> Kevin "Rashid" Johnson has written an interesting essay (*Black Cats Have Many Lives: Reviving the Vanguard Party and Building the United Panther Movement*.) comparing the FBI repression of the Black liberation movement and its internal divisions to the divisions within Russian social democracy after the 1905 revolution. A key difference between the Bolsheviks and the BPP, Rashid argues, is the lack of a Lenin-like figure (or figures) in the movement to lead in the line struggle. This has meant, he argues, that the black liberation movement's recession has lasted much longer than the Bolsheviks did. In his words:

Whereas V.I. Lenin was able to wage a struggle to maintain a correct line upon which to lead the Russian revolution to success under the leadership of his Bolshevik faction, the BPP failed to provide such a leader of Lenin's caliber to wage this internal line struggle. Consequently the decline of the BPP and official containment of the potentially insurgent oppressed masses in Amerika has lasted several decades – far longer than the Russian experience.

The takeaway point for our purposes here is the tragic fate experienced by the black liberation movement in the U.S. over the last four decades stemming from the dispersal and fissuring of its revolutionary leadership.



“Generals” or the leading cadre in the organization of the rank-and-file?

### “GENERALS”:

#### THE PRINCIPAL COHESIVE FORCE

This is the section of the Party that Gramsci called the principle cohesive element, which

Centralises nationally and renders effective and powerful a complex series of forces which left to themselves would count for little or nothing. This element is endowed with great cohesive, centralising, and disciplinary powers also – and this is perhaps the basis for the others – *with the power of innovation*.<sup>21</sup>

Without delving into an extended exegesis on what Gramsci may have meant by the *innovation* of the leading element, suffice it to say that I believe his conception largely concerned innovation at the level of overall strategy. But in our day as much as in Gramsci’s, there’s no doubt that rank-and-file elements and intermediate cadre would be required to innovate in all sorts of ways in the face of the problems encountered in the course of their own specific party work.

Gramsci goes on to argue that while this cohesive element could not form the Party unto themselves, they could do so more easily than the mass element:

One speaks of generals without an army, but in reality it is easier to form an army than to form generals. So much is this true that an already existing army is destroyed if it loses its generals, while the existence of a united group of generals who agree among themselves and have common aims soon creates an army even where none exists.<sup>22</sup>

But how does a core of revolutionary leaders actually lead a comparatively far greater number of rank-and-file members? Not through demagogic speeches, not through one directional chain of command, and not merely in the communist press or theoretical jour-

nals. The chain of leadership is only complete by the existence of an intermediate strata of cadre.

#### CADRE: THE INTERMEDIATE ELEMENT

What Gramsci calls the “intermediate element” is that stratum of the Party which “articulates the first element [the “mass element”] with the second [“the principal cohesive element”] and maintains contact between them, not only physically but morally and intellectually.”

By “articulate”, we can take this as meaning that the role of cadre is to explain the program to, organize, and provide direction to the rank-and-file of the Party. By its “moral” character, Gramsci is probably referring to the example that the cadre set for the mass element to be inspired by and emulate.

If Gramsci’s schema seems like a crude hierarchy of thinking leaders directing a mass of mindless drones, don’t get it twisted. Gramsci considered every person a philosopher in his or her own right. But the capacity to think independently and comprehensively of the institutions of the ruling classes, to actually break with the ideological hegemony and world outlook of dominant social groups, is not a capacity that emerges spontaneously or all at once. The role of the Party is, among other things, to facilitate the creation of an “intellectual-moral bloc” which can count among its tasks: (1) the repetition of basic arguments concerning its outlook on the world; and (2) to raise the intellectual level of the masses and to raise new intellectuals directly out of the masses, which Gramsci called ‘organic intellectuals’. Cadre play a central role in these tasks, for it is by the cadre that the revolutionary vision is articulated to the masses in the context of their lived experiences and it is by the cadre that organic intellectuals are trained from the masses and elevated into the rank-and-file and ultimately cadre or even revolutionary leaders.

Now what ties these three sections of the Party together is an iron conviction that a solution has at last been found to the historical problems faced by the oppressed and exploited, and this solution takes the form of a Party

21 Hoare, Quintin and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds.). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (International Publishers Co. Inc.: New York, 1971), 152.

22 Ibid, 153.

Program.<sup>23</sup> The Party Program is the means by which leading cadre can be solidly united, act with unwavering conviction, train cadre systematically and provide them with clear strategic direction to recruit, organize, and advance much larger numbers of rank-and-file, who in turn must be trained to build and advance the mass institutions and organizations of the revolution.

### PEDAGOGY AND THE PARTY PROGRAM

Let's come back to the question of pedagogy, because I believe this is a key ingredient to how the above layers of leadership and membership relate to one another.

As we discussed above, Freire described pedagogy as a problem-solving form of education; or in other words, consciousness-raising must be action oriented, it must be a praxis (the dialectical unity of theory and practice). But there's never merely one "solution" to a problem.

The act of problem-solving, as with anything done in the name of the oppressed and exploited, splits into two: a bourgeois line and a proletarian line. First, there are the paths of least resistance, the "solutions" that (bourgeois) "common sense" would dictate we follow, the excrement that follows any sentence that begins with "Let's be pragmatic..." These are the quick-fixes that pursue a narrow "solution" for the few in the short-term at the expense of the many both in the short-term and long-term. Such "solutions" are not only *permitted* by the bourgeois state, they are consciously set up all around the masses like bear-traps looking to snatch a leg out from underneath any revolutionary movement. It's the "justice" sought after through "civilian oversight bodies" that investigate the police whenever they murder a proletarian youth; it's the "justice" you get when you're standing in front of a state tribunal when your ceiling comes crashing in on your head in your slumlord apartment, and maybe you get a small payout.

<sup>23</sup> For a greater elaboration of Gramsci's views on the Party, philosophy, and the role of the intellectual, see my essay "Towards the War of Position: Gramsci in Continuity and Rupture with Marxism-Leninism", which appears in Volume #4 of *Uprising*, particularly the section "What is philosophy and who is the 'Organic Intellectual'" on p.28.

It's even those historical moments when your class enemy looks you straight in the eye and extends a hand in peace and reconciliation, concealing a knife behind his back in the other hand, waiting for the moment to stick it in the revolution's throat.

So the answers and "solutions" that flow from critical dialogue or pedagogical praxis are not at all straightforward. They must be programmatically guided. They must be evaluated for their class content, and the long-term interests of the international proletariat. This is what makes so much of the critical pedagogy taught to educators in bourgeois institutions of "higher learning" such a sham. At best, students are encouraged to think critically about how they've been screwed over by history without seriously exploring how to collectively do anything about it. Thus, "liberation" gets rendered into one of the many individualistic self-help and self-indulgent practices that we find from the politics of postmodernism to New Age mysticisms.

When a revolutionary program exists that indeed correctly frames the historical problems faced by the oppressed and exploited and poses a viable strategic option for revolution, then it becomes that much easier to illustrate in the course of critical dialogue that the path of least resistance is not only not the only option, but rolls us right down the hill of historical defeat. A revolutionary program is absolutely necessary for a revolutionary pedagogical praxis, and without one we will of course be limited in our revolutionary work. (That doesn't mean we should bluff and just put out a program if we haven't genuinely found solutions to the problems of history, and when our framing of historical conditions of the oppressed and exploited can only but be partial, limited, and shoddy by our own underdevelopment.)

I concur with Freire that a pedagogical praxis is essential for revolution, because it is essential for training, elevating, and recruiting new layers of revolutionaries and leaders. But a sound pedagogical practice also requires a revolutionary program.

Coming full circle back to where this essay started, I believe that the serious limitations that our own organization faced by 2013-2014

had much to do with our own underdeveloped leadership and training processes. We lacked a trained and united core of cadre; and the “generals” we did have – *and that would be a very generous framing of our leaders at the time* – while trying to push forward party development by developing strategic discussion documents and such, failed at the most crucial task of cadre development and revolutionary mentorship. We held a growing number of people together not on the basis of ideological coherence but unity through action in mass work. And when our mass organizations met the limits of their growth – essentially because of weak or absent pedagogical praxes that limited our abilities to recruit and expand membership ranks – then our party-building organization went into crisis as well. We crashed into the limitations of our methods of party-building. A small but important minority, including some former leaders, proved unwilling or without the morale to push ahead into uncertain times and carry through a tough period of assessment and reconfiguration, and so they made their departure from our project.

But many of us proceeded. And in the course of a very healthy and refreshing internal struggle around women’s liberation – which brought many comrades to discover the revolutionary concepts to not only examine their lived experiences with patriarchal oppression as well as unchecked instances of male chauvinism in the organization – what we discovered was that the moment class struggle became immanent to the organization, the moment where pushing the organization forward could only be done by each and every comrade participating in a deep process of criticism and self-criticism, that became the moment when a whole new layer of members were consolidated and were advanced along the road of revolutionary commitment. In short, our internal struggle around women’s liberation became the moment where we internally discovered pedagogy.

We can’t expect every comrade in a revolutionary organization to operate with the same capacity or ability at any given moment. But we can expect, in fact we must expect and must be prepared to actively support, the development of all possible comrades to train

and develop more revolutionaries in their turn, i.e. to employ a pedagogical praxis in the mass movement and ultimately in the Party.

Gramsci’s categories of party leadership paint for us a picture, in very broad strokes, of the qualities and roles of various leadership levels in the revolutionary party. In an internal discussion around questions of levels of party membership and leadership training, Comrade Pierce circulated what many leading comrades considered to be an important corrective to how we began to originally frame these concepts in light of reading Gramsci:

Certainly there will be different capacities for and qualities of leadership within a revolutionary organization, I’m not trying to suggest that we pretend a flatness that doesn’t exist. I’ve also been around for long enough that I’ve seen instances where the same person exercises outstanding revolutionary leadership in one context (or at one time) and totally destructive leadership in another.

The thing that will secure strong, effective and sustainable leadership in our organization is a committed and accountable collective leadership and the meaningful participation of as large as possible a pool of committed revolutionaries in the practice of democratic centralism.

Comrade Pierce goes on to say that we needed to

make it clear that the differentiation between cadre and leading cadre is not static and that as part of a healthy organizational practice different cadre will move into organizational leadership at different times and based on particular circumstances. The leadership is collective and based on the needs of the organization, not the individual prowess of particular cadre.<sup>24</sup>

So while acknowledging certain features of the leadership of what Gramsci called the “Generals,” namely their role in serving as the “principal cohesive force,” especially in the theoretical and strategic innovation of the organization which not every cadre will be adept at but must participate in, Comrade Pierce’s considerations concerning the necessity of a robust collective leadership are vital to the expansion of revolutionary organization.

<sup>24</sup> R.I. Internal Correspondence, early 2015.



## CONCLUSION

The purpose of putting names to these various levels is not to reinforce or harden divisions between them. We have no intentions of decorating “Generals” / leading cadre or suggesting that to be a rank-and-file is a station one just has to accept in life. These categories are an essential schema for understanding the actual capacities and necessary qualities of leadership that will and must exist in any revolutionary organization so that we can arrange our members appropriately towards maximizing our collective strength and in time building up each comrade to be a better revolutionary.

The most effective recruiters in our organization past and present have had anywhere between 10 and 20 years experience organizing, for the better part of this time consciously as communists; but with a shit-load of this time spent needlessly in trial and error and dead ends that were the result of themselves not having had sufficient revolutionary leadership and organization to train them effectively and efficiently in their own political lives. We can't wait, the world can't wait, 10-20 years for a new layer of revolutionary leaders to emerge.

In the discussions our leadership has had in the last six months, our internal assessment is that virtually all of our members are capable

of becoming organizational cadre – and that's obviously not the same as saying that all or even the majority of members of a communist party will be more than rank-and-file members. It's also not to say that basic party members will not be required to make incredible feats.

But being in the pre-party phase of our development still, we really need to focus on cadre development to ensure that we continue to have the capacity to grow and advance the revolutionary struggle. We need leading cadre who can formulate vision and viable strategy in a consultative manner that moves everyone else forward and who can develop cadre. We need cadre, in turn, who lead and develop rank-and-file members; and we need those cadre and rank-and-file members to agitate and lead the people in advancing revolutionary struggle. And for all the reasons discussed above, pedagogical praxis will be the sinews that bind these layers of a revolutionary organization together. It will be operational principle that will actualize what we believe deep-down as Maoists, that “The masses are the makers of history.” But the masses are only the makers of history once they have become conscious of their place in it. And a pedagogy praxis will be necessary to bring that consciousness out.



# A Strategic Approach to Proletarian Internationalism

by Comrade Pierce

March 2015

## INTRODUCTION

The RI Document *Proletarian Internationalism: A Duty for all Revolutionaries* (Volume #1 Uprising) has been a useful document in guiding the work of RI and there is much in this document that should be upheld and studied by revolutionaries.<sup>1</sup> In particular the document is very clear about the nature of Canada as an imperialist country based on settler colonialism, and that challenging Canadian imperialism is a key responsibility of proletarian revolutionaries in Canada.

The core of the document is a good summary of the history and development of proletarian internationalism, tracing this history through the three communist internationals, to Mao's critique of the Third

<sup>1</sup> The only part of the document that really merits a re-write is the first paragraph because it fails to draw a distinction between progressive and reactionary/chauvinistic forms of nationalism, and possibly conflates sentiments of attachment to a homeland, birthplace or Indigenous territory with narrow bourgeois nationalism.

International and a summary of Maoist principles for multi-lateral relations between revolutionary parties. This section is a good introduction for party members and a good basis for further study, discussion and elaboration.

The document, however, suffers from a major inadequacy. It's assessment of the international situation ends with the 1960s and it does not attempt to analyse and assess the major contradictions shaping the world today. As a consequence the section Priorities and Directions for Our Movement stays at the level of general principles. Lacking an up to date analysis of the international situation, it could not propose a strategy for the proletarian and revolutionary forces internationally, or for our forces within that context.

This weakness led to mistakes in the work put into building relationships at the international level. Time and energy was put into building relationships and solidarity with essentially social democratic forces that would have been better used in strengthening



long term alliances with other revolutionary organizations. The lack of sharpness in international analysis also contributed to confusion and muddling of the distinct tasks of building the multi-national united front within the borders currently claimed by Canada, and building alliances and unity at the international level.

This paper tries to correct this inadequacy by providing:

- An assessment of the current international situation and the major contradictions in the world today
- A strategic orientation for our proletariat-an internationalism
- Tasks for our organization based on this strategic orientation<sup>2</sup>

### 1. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT INTERNATIONAL SITUATION AND THE MAJOR CONTRADICTIONS IN THE WORLD TODAY

The major contradictions in the world today are:

<sup>2</sup> This document does not take up the question of relationship to Indigenous peoples, nations and forces within the borders of the Canadian colonial settler state which is a linked issue, but requires its own discussion.

- The contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat;
- The contradiction between imperialism and the oppressed nations and peoples;
- The contradiction between the imperialist powers and their blocks (inter-imperialist rivalry); and
- The contradiction between Patriarchy and women.<sup>3</sup>

Of these contradictions, the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is the most fundamental contradiction because it underpins and shapes the others. But the main contradiction in the world today is between imperialism and the oppressed nations. This is the contradiction around which the most intense struggles are being waged and where there is the greatest chance of a revolutionary breakthrough that would shift the balance of forces on a world scale.<sup>4</sup> As Jose Maria Sison

<sup>3</sup> There are other contradictions that could be discussed and debated such as the contradiction between capitalism's need for growth and the ability of the planet to sustain human life; and the contradiction between imperialism and the countries and states asserting national independence. But the four included above are the ones that we have the most analysis and unity on as RI.

<sup>4</sup> By using 'fundamental' and 'main' as my descriptors I'm trying to be concrete and avoid a debate about principal versus secondary contradiction at the philosophical



Kurdish women fighters of the People's Protection Units (YPG) fighting ISIS in 2015.



explains:

The main contradiction today is between the imperialist powers and the oppressed peoples and nations. It is so in two respects: first, because imperialist oppression and exploitation are the most intensive and extensive among the oppressed people and nations; and second, because armed revolutions led by revolutionary parties of the proletariat are today taking place in Asia, Africa and Latin America and will probably increase and intensify before a global war can break out among the imperialists or before the proletariat can seize power from the monopoly bourgeoisie in any imperialist country (see Jose Maria Sison in *At Home in the World – Portrait of a Revolutionary: Conversations with Ninotchka Rosca*).

Even within the imperialist countries this main contradiction is apparent, for example in the growing resistance of Indigenous people and nations in Canada, renewed Black rebellion in the U.S. and the periodic uprisings of

level. The language around principal contradiction is a bit of a political minefield among Maoists, so it's important that we work out how we engage this debate as an organization. Jose Maria Sison has been very consistent over many years that the main contradiction is between imperialism and the oppressed peoples and nations and that the main task for revolutionaries in the imperialist countries is to build revolutionary parties, which is the position I'm advocating here.

immigrant youth in France and other European countries. These struggles have a greater potential for breaking through bourgeois ideological hegemony, evolving new and more intense struggle, and shifting the balance of class forces than any recent struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

But the main event is in the oppressed and colonized countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, where the political, ideological and military infrastructure of imperialism is weakest, and where there is the greatest potential for a revolutionary breakthrough that could intensify the crisis of imperialism and generate new bases and resources for proletarian revolution.

As proletarian revolutionaries in Canada it is strategic for us to support these struggles that have the most potential to generate breakthroughs, intensify the crisis of imperialism, and hasten the conditions for proletarian revolution in the imperialist countries!

## 2. A STRATEGIC ORIENTATION FOR OUR PROLETARIAN INTERNATIONALISM

Given the strategic importance of the struggles of the proletariat and revolutionary forces in the oppressed nations, what is the responsibility of proletarian revolutionaries



A scene from Ferguson in response to the killing of Michael Brown. The uprisings of the black/New Afrikan populations in Baltimore and Ferguson in the last year are a glimpse of the significance that resistance to national oppression will have to play in any revolutionary struggle in the U.S. What does this mean for Canada, where the black/Caribbean/African working class concentrations in major urban centers face similar forms of oppression? What is the significance of the "land question" in relation to national liberation in the two respective countries?

in the imperialist countries? We recognize that imperialism is not an 'optional' policy of the Canadian monopoly capitalist ruling class, and therefore, working within the confines of the bourgeois 'democratic' process, even a strong international solidarity movement can only have a marginal impact on the policies and practise of Canadian imperialism.<sup>5</sup> We therefore take the position that as communists in the imperialist core we need to have something more substantive to bring to the table in terms of solidarity. We need to accumulate forces and create a revolutionary organization capable of posing a real threat to the Canadian imperialist state and ruling class, and forcing them to wage a struggle on two fronts.

The accumulation of revolutionary forces gives us a base for active solidarity with the most advanced proletarian revolutionary forces and the capacity to take advantage of changing conditions to strike blows against Canadian imperialism and advance towards revolution in Canada.

However, this long-term strategic orientation should not be used to dismiss the difference that our solidarity can make for our brothers and sisters fighting on the frontlines, even in our context of bourgeois dictatorship and unfavourable balance of class forces. There is solidarity that we can provide in the short term that is requested, meaningful and appreciated by revolutionary movements in the oppressed nations. We should also remember how a militant practice of proletarian internationalism actually strengthens our efforts towards accumulation of revolutionary forces; as a bulwark against reformism, economism and movementism, and in attracting revolutionaries and potential revolutionaries to our organization.

So we should pursue a long term strategy of accumulating revolutionary forces and

<sup>5</sup> As an example a large and well organized movement in solidarity with Palestine, which includes many petty bourgeois church and liberal human rights folks and is able to mobilize tens of thousands of people across the country during Israeli massacres and military operations, has in no way been able to break the relationship between Canada and Israel which is based on shared imperialist interests, mutually beneficial economic ties and a similar history of racist and genocidal settler-colonialism.

building an organization that will eventually be capable of posing a revolutionary threat to Canadian imperialism and forcing the imperialists to fight on two fronts; and in the short term should provide whatever meaningful concrete support we can to those revolutionary forces in the oppressed and colonized countries that are making the greatest contributions to the international proletarian cause.

This leaves us with two important questions: (i) how do we identify which revolutionary forces and struggles should be most prioritized for support? and (ii) in the short term what forms of support are the most useful to our revolutionary comrades in the oppressed nations?

#### (I) IDENTIFYING REVOLUTIONARY FORCES

It's important to begin here by upholding basic principles of proletarian internationalism including general support for all proletarian forces engaged in class struggle, anti-imperialist people's struggles, and struggles of national liberation, and the fostering of good relationships with a broad array of proletarian revolutionary forces (avoiding the sectarian mistake of focusing only on 'Maoist' parties or organizations).

But given our limited resources and capacities it's important to be strategic and focused in where we put our energies as an organization. We need to differentiate between those movements, struggles and organizations deserving of support on basic principles of proletarian internationalism and those which have a special strategic merit and make a significant contribution to the whole revolutionary project of the proletariat. Criteria to use in making this distinction should include:

- (a) mass proletarian base
- (b) participation of women and revolutionary women's leadership
- (c) proletarian revolutionary theory
- (d) armed struggle
- (e) dual power/ pre-socialist practice
- (f) liberated territory



Organizations and movements that meet most or all of these criteria can be considered as exemplary and leading forces.

## (II) SUPPORT

We are best positioned to provide meaningful support to revolutionary movements from the oppressed nations and peoples when we have regular contact with them at multiple levels – between revolutionary organizations; at the level of the mass organizations; and people to people. This will allow our international comrades to communicate what types of solidarity are most useful to them, for us to evaluate these tactics in light of our main strategy of accumulating revolutionary forces and engaging in revolutionary mass struggle and to arrive at practices that support both revolutionary endeavors.

If there are instances where the support requested seems to be in contradiction with our own strategy and tactics we should engage in discussion. If we view the tactics deployed by a revolutionary force as being destructive to the proletarian project as a whole we should engage in a process of constructive criticism.

## 3. TASKS FOR OUR ORGANIZATION

At the level of the organization we can now re-iterate the principles originally laid out in the *Proletarian Internationalism: A Duty for All Revolutionaries* document with a more

strategic ordering and articulation:

### (I) ACCUMULATION OF REVOLUTIONARY FORCES

Accumulation of revolutionary forces and building of a revolutionary movement capable of challenging Canadian Imperialism and forcing it to wage a battle on two fronts and advancing toward revolution in the territories currently claimed and controlled by the Canadian colonial settler state is the top priority. This clarifies that the core tasks of building a revolutionary party – the building of mass organizations, recruitment, political education and development of party infrastructure – are a foundational element of an effective strategy of proletarian internationalism.

### (II) IDENTIFY, BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH, AND PROVIDE SUPPORT TO THE MOST EXEMPLARY REVOLUTIONARY AND PROLETARIAN FORCES.

This will require ongoing SICA including the sending of representatives to learn from, study and build up our expertise on the most advanced revolutionary movements. Comrades with organic (organizational, kinship, national) connections to particular struggles and revolutionary movements can be an important source of information and insight on these movements, but our party positions should be based on a rigorous and collective analysis of the best possible information and not the particular loyalties or tendencies of individual party members. The use of criteria such as



A scene from the 46th anniversary celebrations of the Communist Party of the Philippines, with a performance from women fighters in the New People's Army in Marihatag, Surigao del Sur, December 26 2014.



the ones given above will allow for this kind of maximally objective collective analysis and also for revisiting decisions in a structured way based on ongoing developments.

**(III) PRACTICE PRINCIPLED PROLETARIAN INTERNATIONALISM IN BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER PROLETARIAN REVOLUTIONARY FORCES.**

In addition to identifying and supporting the exemplary revolutionary forces it is important to work to create a context and culture of principled proletarian internationalism in which a variety of international proletarian and revolutionary forces can begin to relate to each other, cooperate and eventually coordinate and work collaboratively. Recognizing our small size and early stage of development this process can initially begin with building relationships with the forces we come into contact with through our mass work and international alliances.

**(IV) PROPAGATE PROLETARIAN INTERNATIONALISM IN OUR MASS CAMPAIGNS, EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM, AND PROPAGANDA**

At level of day to day work we must be constantly exposing and opposing Canadian imperialism, and promoting and defending revolutionary and national liberation struggles among the masses. This includes campaigns, educational activities and propaganda to support the exemplary forces, but it also includes visible and vocal partisanship to engage and win over the masses that we are organizing based on more immediate class-struggle issues and campaigns.

**4. AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY**

**CENTRE**

- Responsible for identifying the exemplary revolutionary forces (with input from units and members) and consciously building bilateral relationships with them at the revolutionary level
- Responsible for identifying the most

important and needed tactics to show solidarity with these exemplary forces

- Responsible for engaging multi-lateral formations of revolutionary organizations and modeling a practice of principled, non-sectarian, proletarian internationalism

**UNITS**

- Responsible for regular and ongoing study and discussion on the exemplary revolutionary forces
- Responsible for assigning members and cadres to initiate, lead or join campaigns and activities to support the exemplary revolutionary forces
- Encouraged to engage in revolutionary propaganda campaigns to popularize the exemplary revolutionary forces

**CADRES**

- Responsible for struggling for an anti-imperialist line within the mass organizations they work in, particularly exposing and opposing Canadian imperialism
- Responsible for encouraging the mass organizations they work in to build org-to-org, sector-to-sector and people-to-people relationships with proletarian and anti-imperialist organizations from the oppressed nations and peoples
- Responsible for promoting and defending the exemplary revolutionary forces amongst the masses
- Share our knowledge and analysis of revolutionary and proletarian forces with our comrades at the unit level and the leadership and participate in the identification of exemplary forces

Comrade Pierce, January 2015