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Rectify and Reboot:

A Critical Summation of RI's Ten Years of Party-Building

Things Done Changed

Part II of IV in the *Specter that Still Haunts* Series

Communist Leadership, Mass Work, and Building Power

**How R.I.'s mass work made me a
better revolutionary communist**

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Editorial Introduction to Uprising Volume 8

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Issue #8 of *Uprising* marks a turning point in the development of our organization. This edition of our theoretical journal is a landmark that separates the end of a phase of internal struggle and rectification from the beginning -- or resumption, rather -- of party-building that is rooted in the proletarian masses. It is indeed a reaffirmation of the instincts that founded this organization to begin with, albeit with some new-found clarity on methods of work and a deeper understanding of the immense tasks that confront us. Since our founding in 2006, we have believed that a revolutionary communist organization cannot be constituted at a distance from the mass struggle, and this edition of *Uprising* signals our return to that point of departure.

The pillars of *Uprising* #8 are, one, our ten year assessment, "Rectify and Reboot: A Critical Summation of RI's Ten Years of Party-Building," and two, the main document to have emerged from our rectification process, "Communist Leadership, Mass Work, and Building Power." There's no more that needs to be said about these documents in this introduction other than their significance to our organization's development. We have also included Comrade Anna's "How RI's Mass Work Made Me a Better Revolutionary Communist," which although written nearly two years ago, gives our readers an eye into the subjective situation of comrades in our organization as we had just begun to reground our party-building in the proletarian masses.

Finally, also included in this issue is the long-overdue continuation of Kenny Lake's series "Specter that Still Haunts" series. Part II of that project, "Things Done Changed," is published here in Issue #8, with Parts III and IV long-ago written and appear very shortly on our website and to be published in the forthcoming issues of *Uprising*.

Given the intense organizational work it has taken within R.I. to rectify and re-deploy ourselves, the theoretical work in front of us has piled up. We are long past due to bring forward as theoretical interventions the perspectives that have been simmering within our organization for some time. To give our readers and supporters a sense of what's to come, look forward to interventions at some point down the road, hopefully sooner rather than later, on the following questions:

- understanding fascism today
- rethinking the "magic weapons" of revolutionary struggle
- national oppression and national liberation in North America
- the question of democracy, proletarian vs. bourgeois
- rethinking our tasks in the face of ecological catastrophes of the coming century

...among others. So stay tuned. And write us with your thoughts and contributions at revintcan@gmail.com. *Uprising* has always been and remains open to any and all theoretical contributions that can push our revolutionary struggle forward.

-Uprising Editor

RECTIFY AND REBOOT

A Critical Summation of RI's Ten Years of Party Building

Central Committee, Revolutionary Initiative

PREFACE

If we do not carry out public summations, if we engage in self-criticism only regarding issues of personal behaviour, and not **regarding the material stakes of our politics and tactics**, then we cannot advance, even one step, towards building a Maoist communist party... We must popularize our summations: **if we exclusively sum up our experience internally, then we have offered nothing to the revolutionary camp** – indeed, our work will be ‘summed up’ by the class state. As Mao puts it, we must “sum up concrete experience and spread it rapidly among the masses so that what is correct will be promoted and what is wrong will not be repeated.”

–Maoist Communist Group,
Three Documents of the MCG
(our emphases).

Organizational assessments move with ease when we succeed. Successes are rarely interrogated, and summing up victories makes for easy accounting. By contrast, when we fail, falter, or fall far short of what’s demanded of us, the task of assessment is so laden with our past mistakes that it can seem impossible to push forward. However, if we fail to sum-up and evaluate in the face of shortcomings, we allow demoralization to set in, and soon self-liquidation follows. Furthermore, we fail to register our lessons in the larger revolutionary communist movement, potentially allowing the same mistakes to be made again elsewhere.

As revolutionary communists, if we must as Amilcar Cabral advised, “Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories,” then we must be even more stringent in our application of this principle when it comes to how we account for our efforts

within the revolutionary camp.

In the mid-2000s, RI emerged as a break from a lot that was politically stale, dogmatic, reformist, and opportunist in the Greater Toronto Area. We effected a rupture, a fresh initiative. But we did this without a spectacle: No self-aggrandizing declarations were made. We were quietly trying something ... if not new, something that hadn’t been done in our context for some time.

The essence of this rupture from the existing “Left” is that we chose to immerse ourselves in a massive proletarian community where the class enemies of the people were tangible and known. We were neither seeking to capture the dues base of a union local or student union, nor were we looking to make a splash in the bourgeois media to effect a short-term reform. We were seeking long-term entrenchment in the proletariat for the re-initiation of a revolutionary communist movement.

But then, after just a couple baby steps up the hill, we encountered obstacles and found ourselves unsure how to proceed. As we explain in more detail further below, we slowly pulled away from building a base in the proletariat, and unconsciously drifted back into a mode of activism that we had previously tried to break from, albeit with a new veneer of anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, socialism, revolution, Maoism. This cost us the better part of the first decade of our organization, and we’ve had to swallow some bitter pills to come to terms with how and why this happened. We took short-cuts to build our organization, and in the end, we took our party-building into a cul-de-sac that we had to spend a great deal of time backing out of.

After ten years, the last two of which have entailed deep processes of assessment,

rectification, and internal struggle, our party-building continues and we've returned to building a base in the proletariat. We also have a much clearer view of the pitfalls that lay within our immediate horizon. In a way, we're back where we started, but on a higher level.

After some time in a renewed practice of proletarian struggle, the major lessons of our first decade of party-building have come into sharp focus, and it is time to share these with comrades who, like ourselves, are struggling to build a movement of revolutionary communists in the decadent and putrefying old imperialist centres.

It is in a spirit of humility and in the interest of advancing the party-building movement of revolutionary communists in Canada, across the imperialist countries, and across the world that we offer up these lessons in our ten years of party-building.

A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE BOURGEOIS DEVIATION AND THE PRINCIPAL LESSON OF OUR FIRST TEN YEARS OF PARTY-BUILDING

Our decade of party-building can be broken down into three distinct phases: (1) our initial consolidation and first base-building attempt from about 2006-2008; (2) the drift of our mass work away from the proletarian masses from 2008-2013, over the period of which we experienced significant quantitative growth but overall qualitative stagnation; and (3) finally, between 2014-2016, a sequence of crisis, consolidation, and rectification, ultimately culminating in two-line struggle by the end of this period.

The principal lesson we have taken away from this first decade of our party-building is that the revolutionary communist party cannot be developed outside a proletarian base. The proletarian vanguard must be constituted through proletarian class struggle. This statement seems tautological, but contemporary communist praxis, including our own erroneous practice between 2008-2013, requires an assertion of this point. Many have attempted or believe we can build up a "vanguard" organization on campuses, through international solidarity work, or by participation in social justice coalitions. Maybe a half dozen or so comrades can be grouped together in this way. But the proletarian class struggle is the real test for a revolutionary communist and a revolutionary communist organization. Why?

There exists a disjuncture between those segments of society most easily attracted to communism in the first instance, and that stratum of society that will most militantly take up communism if it can prove itself to be a real *philosophy of praxis*.¹ In the last five years or so, North America has witnessed a burgeoning Maoist groupings, but few if any have really succeeded in integrating themselves into the proletariat, in advancing the

1 Many young people come to one expression of Marxism or another in post-secondary school through their formal studies, through campus activism, or through social media. But these Marxisms are not revolutionary – or to use Gramsci's expression, they do not constitute a philosophy of praxis – until they are transformed through revolutionary practice.

philosophy of praxis or *scientific socialism* for our era. In a way, we are in an historical moment akin to the mid 19th century when socialism was an intellectual trend that had not yet embedded itself with the working-class movement. In our ten years of party-building, we have learned the most and our fighting spirit has been the highest when we were cultivating revolutionary theory through practice within the proletariat.

But for all those years and for all those documents that we published defending the significance of mass work in relation to party-building, the truth is that our *practice* of mass work was wrong for the majority of our organization's history. We were not building proletarian power, we were not advancing proletarian revolutionaries, and we were not establishing a political centre for the proletariat. This was not for lack of effort. The problem is that our mass work for the majority of our decade of party-building was not strategically oriented: it was situated in segments of the people who were overwhelmingly not proletarian,² and our areas of work did not constitute a coherent base that could be organized around a common class enemy. Consequently, our mass work wasn't training our comrades to become proletarian revolutionary cadre, and it did not serve as a forge for revolutionary theory. But this wasn't how our organization got started...

Our founding years of 2006-07 represented a real rupture from the stagnant morass of the opportunist and petty-bourgeois "Left" in the Greater Toronto Area.

As one can read in our foundational

2 RI defines the proletariat as that section of the working class that is exploited and super-exploited, including all those who have recently faced or continue to face processes of dispossession that re-proletarianize them and their children (especially Indigenous peoples) into low-wage and precarious workers, if not altogether casting them into the growing mass of people pushed indefinitely into the informal economy to survive. By contrast, we exclude the worker elite from our definition of the proletariat, given the historical departure of this class stratum from the realities of proletarian life. Our provisional analysis on this point of class analysis can be found in Stella B.'s "Class Analysis and Class Structure in Canada," (*Uprising* #7, Fall 2015). Admittedly, the empirical substantiation and analytical clarity of this class analysis still requires a lot of work, but it is an advance on our previous categories.

Basis of Unity document,³ however brief and underdeveloped that internal document was, we were making some significant points of ideologico-political rupture from the existing "Left":

- We declared the necessity for armed struggle as an element of revolutionary struggle in Canada;
- We identified Canada as an imperialist country, and identified the aristocracy of labour as a parasitical and politically conservative force;
- We declared the unqualified right of self-determination of Indigenous peoples; and
- We declared the necessity for proletarian revolutionaries to immerse themselves amongst the proletarian masses guided by mass line practice and in dedication to building a revolutionary communist party.

But these declarations (internal and strictly for our own internal coherence at the time) meant nothing without their actualization into a practical political sequence. We knew that we needed a Party, but we also believed that we couldn't just declare one. We also believed that any further study and ideological development without developing our practice would be erroneous. We needed to separate the wheat from the chaff, and this is what mass work did for us.

As we found ourselves unifying around Maoism, we seriously considered joining the precursor to the PCR-RCP, the Organizing Committees of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Canada (RCP-OCs). We conducted an intensive study of its draft Programme, and attended their 1st Canadian Revolutionary Congress. We attended with the intention and expectation of a substantive discussion on the draft program. Instead, we sat through a long program of presentations, speeches, and scripted statements in support and solidarity for the RCP-OCs. Unable to find immediate unity with the Programme, especially around questions of how the Party relates to the masses and mass organizations as well as what exactly was the RCP-OCs strategy of a Protracted People's War, we decided to

3 See our "Basis of Unity," in *The Theoretical Journal of Revolutionary Initiative: Volume 1 2006-2009 Ideological Documents*, p.2-3.

remain independent and maintain fraternal relations with these comrades.

So with our basis of unity providing some provisional cohesion, we threw ourselves into a proletarian base rich with class conflict. We entered into a vast proletarian neighbourhood where youth were shooting each other dead over petty rivalries and for market share at the lowest strata of the drug trade; where community members were getting caught in the crossfire; where whole families were being evicted for their kids' participation in criminalized industries; where mothers were having their kids taken away from by the modern-day baby snatchers of Child Apprehension Services; where people's ceilings were literally falling in on their beds in the middle of the night; where people were trying to re-establish their lives after fleeing from imperialist-backed civil wars, only to be told that their new community was going to be destroyed through "revitalization". There were no shortage of contradictions or class enemies in the base we chose.

For a year, we made serious inroads into building contacts among and developing rapport with proletarians in this hood. We investigated and agitated around the main concerns of the people. But after a year or so of work, at the first signs of impasse, difficulties, and false-starts in trying to bring people into organization as leaders and active participants in the struggle, a rift opened up within our ranks concerning the prospects for class struggle in the neighbourhood.

This didn't happen all at once and it wasn't completely conscious, but it was an expression of some of those among us looking to take *paths of lesser resistance* in the face of challenges in our mass organizing. Some began to blame the masses in subtle ways. Some suggested maybe we chose the wrong hood, or the wrong issues.

As any new communist project that had yet to be tempered by the tests of class struggle, we were bound to hit walls that we wouldn't immediately know how to overcome. No one we knew anywhere was attempting what we were doing, at least not in our region, and we knew of no contemporary points of reference to study for lessons and

inspiration. We were rookies in class struggle with few to no mentors of our own. Our points of inspiration were distant: the Black Panthers, the Young Lords, or revolutionary struggles distant times and places. Under these circumstances, rather than dig deep into assessing our own work, our people began to rebound. The more petty-bourgeois and worker-elite elements were the quickest to express their lack of faith in the masses. The beginning of our deviation within our base expressed itself as an increasingly social service orientation towards the masses under the guise of a "Serve the People" rhetoric. The arguments put forward by comrades advocating and taking up this work was that this is how we would gain more contacts and trust with the masses. So we conducted legal workshops on people's rights and cultural activities for youth. But this work did nothing to gain "a deeper trust" with the masses: not a single advanced element among the people was brought forth by these initiatives, and this work was undertaken with no proof that our door-to-door social investigation and propaganda were failing in earning the political trust of the masses.

When it comes to errors made in the course of struggle, a line needs to be drawn between those errors arising from *inexperience* and those made under the force of liberalism. We will refer back to this distinction throughout our assessment. But the errors made in our first base-building project were definitely a mix of the two.

A defeatism began creeping into our ranks as the social service oriented approach proved its inability to push us beyond the limits of where our first attempts at organizing had brought us. This should have been the basis for our first two-line struggle in the organization and through the ranks of activists around us. But we didn't know any better. Instead, our leadership allowed for a reassignment of our members and other activists in the orbit of RI into new and seemingly promising areas of work.

But tragically, this dispersal came at the cost of untethering our young project away from a major *faultline*⁴ in our region and into

4 By faultline, we mean a site in society where there is a

areas of work which, for the most part, lacked both a definite and stable proletarian base and clear and tangible class enemies. RI members and other activists were dispersed into a series of new projects lacking both an analysis of class and conjuncture of the new terrains we were entering into.

As we began to pull away from base-building in the proletariat, the organizations we built began to look more and more like the creatures of the activist “Left” that we had previously tried to break from. Rallies, seminars, and fora with more and more of the activist “usual suspects” and no clear political Subject. Major mobilizations with no clear enemy — just abstract condemnations of capitalism and imperialism, after which we were left feeling spent, with few or no new recruits and no qualitative advance in our level of organization, number of people, or quality of cadre.

The more the center of gravity of our work shifted into spaces overlapping with the activist “Left”, the more we had to deal with internecine conflicts with anti-communist social justice warriors where there was little more at stake than the egos of the activists involved. We abandoned the principle of keeping *proletarian* politics in command the moment we removed our organizing from contexts with palpable class antagonisms. RI became more bureaucratic and less democratic centralist as our mass-line practice waned. We were becoming more of a valourized study group with a dues paying membership where people were required to have their activism centrally directed (albeit with no clear strategic plan and no debate on strategy, and thus little democracy). Most of us were convinced that what we were doing was right because our *quantitative growth* masked our *qualitative stagnation*, and because in many ways we looked at a lot better than the rest of “the Left” (which isn’t saying much).

In essence, this marked the beginning of a bourgeois trend in the organization that would take hold for the next five years. The proletarian revolutionary impulse that found palpable friction between bourgeois and proletarian segments of the population, a class antagonism that is latent with the potential to organize and mobilize the proletariat against immediate and discernible class enemies.

ed the organization gave way to a bourgeois trend that chose multiple paths of lesser resistance. What made this trend bourgeois is that we retreated more and more into activism with an entirely distinct and non-proletarian social base. Areas of work were chosen not on the basis of a clear strategic plan with a sharp or deepening class analysis, but on the personal whims of leading members. This would eventually create more opportunities for opportunists inside our ranks and around us. Any political work done exclusively or mostly within the segments of the people that are not the leading or main forces of the proletarian revolution will amount to nothing more than jockeying for influence, power, prestige, and position *within* bourgeois society.

Why and how was this deviation able to occur? We must remember that a bourgeois deviation within a communist organization almost never expresses itself through an openly bourgeois program. It arises spontaneously by the omnipresence of bourgeois ideology around us that is going unchallenged when the proletarian revolutionary line is weak in an organization. We identify this as a bourgeois deviation not because the organization was wholly bourgeois, not because the leadership was counter-revolutionary. No. But any political line that fails to push forward the proletarian revolution — which in our phase, is the establishment of a viable revolutionary communist organization — and instead pushes us clearly in the opposite direction, is a bourgeois line.

So how did the bourgeois deviationist trend take hold? Instead of analyzing closely the hiccups and failures we faced in our first attempts at organizing the proletarian masses between 2007-2008, we dispersed our members into a series of new fronts that seemed to offer more “low hanging fruit” and a quicker pace of growth. Some of these new areas, such as struggles against police brutality, held out great possibility; but most other areas of work simply opened the way for a drift into *movementism* and “embassy politics”.⁵

⁵ As we untethered from our proletarian base areas, our work became *movementist* to the extent that our basis for aligning with other activist groups was not the urgency of concrete class struggle, but rather jockeying for influence and command within paper-tiger alliances. We may have had different intentions than the typical activist groups

Ultimately, abandoning our base-building would carry the consequence of not only holding back our organization's qualitative development, but degenerating it for the better part of a decade. We shrank from the task of figuring out how to do proletarian revolutionary organizing effectively. New projects were taken up without serious reflection upon existing limitations and past failures. Our still underdeveloped methods of work not only remained tainted by our past experiences in the petty-bourgeois activist "Left," they were renewed afresh in the milieu of petty-bourgeois activism that we returned to. Our only distinction, the only edge we had, was the outward façade of a proletarian and anti-imperialist politics, and this edge made us a trend for a while.

within our alliances: we didn't actually believe reform was possible through our alliances. We sought to make ideological interventions for socialism, in defence of the proletariat, and against Canadian imperialism. We sought to bring class analysis and anti-imperialism to activism. But with no firm base of our own in the proletariat, our defence of class struggle was on very weak footing. And few other organizations within the alliances we built or participated represented the masses in class struggle. They were as much or more composed of activists grouped together along lines of identity or issues with no common strategic purpose: only short-term, event-oriented objectives. Within this movementist milieu, an independent but related problem was the opportunist drift of our internationalist activities throughout the years of our bourgeois deviation. This trend has been partially identified and criticized by Comrade Pierce in his piece "A Strategic Approach to Proletarian Internationalism" (*Uprising* #6, Summer 2015). But what was not named in that document in particular was a distinct trend that should be named, criticized, and guarded against in the future: *embassy politics*. In the midst of lack lustre mass work and no proletarian struggle, we drew legitimacy through our connection or orientation to third world struggles. Some of these, as in Nepal or the Philippines, were clearly revolutionary and we would in no way discount the importance of our solidarity with the revolutionary struggles in these countries. But in other cases, the movements we connected to, especially in Latin America, were more social movements than revolutionary organizations, at best; and at worst, comrades were linking to the social democratic states in the Bolivarian movement within which the roles of the national bourgeoisies and newly emergent Bolivarian bureaucratic capitalists were not being critically interrogated. This uncritical gravitation towards Bolivarianism by some in our organization, which came at the expense of a lack of real investigation and solidarity into Latin America's revolutionary communist movement, ultimately proved to be motivated less by international solidarity with revolutionary forces and more by the careerist aspirations of some seeking ties with the growing bureaucracies of those social democratic states.

We can perhaps take some credit for resuscitating the political primacy of the working-class (however vaguely defined and perhaps only rhetorically) as well as asserting an anti-imperialist politics in our region. We carried out very widespread and very active propaganda in our founding region, propaganda that swept far beyond the reach of campus Trotskyists and revisionist groups. And our proletarian and anti-imperialist propaganda was a source of wide appeal. We were able to pursue the expansion of the party across the country, as comrades from other regions sought unity with our anti-imperialism and mass-oriented work. *But in deeds*, there were no proletarian politics. We had cracks in our foundations stemming back to our first base project and rather than address them, we proceeded to build a massive edifice upon it that was bound to collapse, as it indeed did, rendering years of effort into little more than bitter lessons that only some would have the guts to swallow.

What exactly was erroneous about our methods of work, and what were the consequences of untethering ourselves from a project of proletarian class struggle, needs to be named and studied if we are to more effectively break the hegemony of petty-bourgeois activist methods and guard against these errors in the future. We know better now what these problems are, and the purpose of this summation is to share these lessons, for, to repeat the opening quote of this assessment from the Maoist Communist Group, "If we exclusively sum up our experience internally, then we have offered nothing to the revolutionary camp... As Mao puts it, we must 'sum up concrete experience and spread it rapidly among the masses so that what is correct will be promoted and what is wrong will not be repeated.'"

Thus far, we have given a roughly chronological account of the bourgeois deviation in the organization. But the major consequences of our untethering from the proletariat cannot be accounted for in simple sequence form. The most coherent way to take stock of the consequences of our untethering is to step back and view them as developing over the long arc of the bourgeois deviation. We break down these consequences into *ideological, political, and organizational* categories.

IDEOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE UNTETHERING

In the realm of our ideological development, our studies were divorced from the practice of proletarian class struggle. First of all, the practical experiences we shared in our first base area was not properly evaluated and theorized. The failure to assess our common experience in struggle was the first way that our theory was divorced from our practice. Then, the dispersal of our members into a series of new projects after 2008 deprived the organization of a common political terrain from which to distill a proletarian revolutionary outlook and ideology. We missed our first opportunity when we shared a common terrain to enrich our class analysis, teach us valuable lessons about a concrete class enemy, and train us in building proletarian organization. Then, after 2008 our ideological development became increasingly disarticulated from practice as our work became altogether fragmented. A kind of book worship came to replace a nascent praxis that was developing in 2007, and the only reason we could get away with it was because the mostly-student demographic that made up our first wave of members could sift through the assigned readings without much of a fuss.

But this practice of book worship would have never been applicable in our base-building project, where at least half of the proletariat did not have English as a first language. Had we remained immersed in the proletariat, we would have been compelled to popularize revolutionary theory. Instead, our methods remained more didactic than pedagogical, trapped too much within the bourgeois modes of instruction that we receive in school and from petty-bourgeois activism.

As for our propaganda, while it was generally accessible and spoke to many of the concrete contradictions people faced in their lives, we could have tapped into people's experiences in a much deeper way through a more dialogical approach to our agit-prop. We were over-reliant on printed propaganda and had no theory of, and would later realize that we desperately needed to theorize, the practice of face-to-face agitational dialogue.

To the extent that we *could* get by with book study divorced from practical class struggle, it should be noted that this practice ultimately did not even advance most of the youth and students who were attracted and recruited to our mass organizations and RI. Many of these comrades could have been moulded into effective leaders of mass struggle and communist cadre. But book study alone could never achieve this. We learned about capitalist imperialism *in the abstract*, but ignored the visceral reasons that pushed any given comrade into struggle to begin with. We didn't dig into people's personal experiences with capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy; we didn't cultivate the personal stakes of our comrades in class struggle... *because there wasn't class struggle*. We not only failed to push ourselves to sit down and dialogue with proletarians on a regular basis and draw out how the struggles in their lives are a reflection of their class's position in bourgeois society, we also failed to do this with ourselves. In other words, there was no *pedagogical praxis* in our organization.⁶ We were not cultivating a philosophy of praxis.

Study disarticulated from practice had repercussions on the whole ideological development of the organization. We had always maintained, and continue to maintain, that

6 In the summer of 2015, Comrade Amil published "The Pedagogy of Party-Building: Reflections on communist leadership development in light of Freire, Gramsci, and Mao," in which some preliminary points of organizational assessment were put forward and some of problems analyzed. While that document is limited and off-the-mark in its assessment of the organization as a whole (as this was not a collective assessment of the organization, but the provisional reflections and observations of one comrade), there were some valuable points in that document that we have carried forward in terms of our understanding of leadership development and pedagogy. In that piece, Comrade Amil relates the ideas in Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to Mao's concept of the mass line. Amil defined pedagogical praxis as "the practice of consciousness-raising through a dialogue between two people or a small number of people, whereby the teacher/communist organizer advances the dialogue through questions that engage with the actual contradictions in the consciousness of her/his interlocuter" (*Uprising* Volume 6, p. 27). When we say that we had no pedagogical praxis in RI, we mean that we had a poor practice of consciousness-raising amongst both our members and the masses. We did not interrogate and unravel the particular contradictions in the consciousness of comrades and the masses alike, because our methods of teaching, instruction and learning were didactic and bookish.

we need a program and a sound strategy for revolution and that this must be based upon a deeper class analysis of Canadian society. We have always believed that it is only through intensive and extensive SICA conducted in the course of class struggle and mass organizing that we could formulate a correct strategy for revolution in Canada. One of our immediate concerns with the RCP's 2006 Programme was what we believed to be a weak class analysis of Canadian society, and one which established *no clear basis* for the strategy of protracted people's war. Even while we saw the RCP's 2006 Programme as the best there was in Canada's small revolutionary left, we didn't believe it to suffice. To be sure, we have yet to produce anything better, but we haven't claimed to. We've always believed that it's worse to bluff at having answers that we really don't have. After ten years, certainly the lack of a program is a sign of failure. But our failure was not that we did not *attempt* an analysis of Canadian society.

In fact, substantial effort was directed towards program development. But this task became overly intellectual given its detachment from concrete class struggle. We invested significant time and resources into a class analysis of Canadian society. But the work undertaken was more bookish than it was based upon the social investigation and class analysis of the struggles of the proletariat in Canada. This is not to say that a program can or should be written strictly from within the domain of immediate experience of the leading elements of an incipient vanguard. We certainly must draw upon the experience of the international communist movement as a whole, and certainly we can draw upon journalism, academia, government reports to aid us. But there is no ready-made program for revolution out there in the annals of academia and NGO reports that is just waiting to be taken up. There is no shortcut to knowing the concrete conditions and circumstances in which a revolutionary movement could be latent without being involved in those concrete conditions and circumstances. By abandoning base-building in the proletariat, we abandoned the context out of which a revolutionary program would begin to take shape.

As much as our retreat from a proletarian

base impacted our ideological development in all the ways elaborated, we also repeatedly made the mistake of not sufficiently studying and theorizing the practice we did have. We made annual summations of our work, but they were as mechanical as they were routine, and the absence of struggle against tangible enemies to ground and focus us stripped our political work of the urgency to sum-up. The stakes were low in the absence of class struggle, and so the act of summation became an act of literally making an account of things done over the previous year. Since throwing ourselves back into a proletarian base once again, we have discovered afresh the urgency and significance of the act of summation and assessment.

POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE UNTETHERING

In the realm of our political development, pulling away from base-building and proletarian class struggle shifted the class basis of our mass work. When we shifted our work and dispersed our members in 2008, we not only lacked a clear class analysis to guide us forward, we did not force ourselves to conduct a deep class analysis of the new sectors or areas of work we were about to venture into. So we did not anticipate that our new work would have long term consequences for the class composition of our recruits and the class outlook of our organization.

Most of the new initiatives undertaken after 2008 had no clear *strategic purpose* or *class analysis* to guide or justify those interventions. And with an underdeveloped class analysis at our disposal, we opened the door to right opportunism in the choice of new areas of political work: We indulged in the whims of comrades wanting to take on this work or that work, with little strategic focus or clarity, and more guided by their comfort zones or types of work maybe compatible with current or future career moves or employment situations. Or, new initiatives were justified on an identitarian basis, wanting to establish a stronger base in the "women's sector" or this or that ethnic community, but again, with no class analysis or strategic clarity. So the social base of our mass work shifted more and more towards students, even as we avoided

campuses; more and more towards the worker elite, even as we avoided organizing within unions proper; and more and more we attracted petty-bourgeois elements. We were always conscious of not letting a flood of petty-bourgeois members into our organizations. But we weren't conscious of letting *petty-bourgeois politics* flood our organizations.

To be sure, this wasn't the exclusive character of all mass work being conducted by RI members. Some initiatives against police brutality and national oppression had better instincts and established work well within the proletariat, but these initiatives also remained limited by the same weakness of lacking an overall strategic conception of the work in relation to party-building. Furthermore, RI having never overcome the limitations in our mass organizing tracing back to our first base area, these problems merely resurfaced in new areas of work.

In any case, these initiatives that found their way into the proletariat were in the minority, and were taken up more at the individual level by a few RI members in spite of the overall bourgeois deviation in the organization. These initiatives received little strategic direction or material support from the central leadership of the organization at the time. However, these more promising fronts, rather than being reinforced, were in fact giving some legitimacy to other areas of work which were, ultimately, destined for failure.

As our party-building shifted away from our early proletarian base, we became increasingly pre-occupied with competing for terrain with the pre-existing "Left" that existed in or around campuses, unions, and a few of the extant left-wing associations in diasporic communities. Our political work became increasingly devoid of class struggle (unless you consider our generalized rhetorical assaults on Canadian imperialism as class struggle), and instead became a struggle with and against other segments of the "Left". All in all, the class composition of our organization shifted more and more in the direction of the petty-bourgeoisie and the worker elite, thereby making it harder and harder to reassert the primacy of proletarian politics in the organization.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE UNTETHERING

In the realm of our organizational development, we had a technocratic conception of leadership, we pursued quantitative development and ignored our qualitative development, and we expanded without consolidation. We viewed leaders as people with some combination of technical know-how, charisma, book smarts, and/or great initiative. In short, anyone well-adapted to managing an organizational post. Although these are important skills for any political organization, skills that our cadre should hone, the petty-bourgeoisie *as a class* has an edge over the proletariat *as a class* in these skills, which is a general reflection of the overall division in society between mental and manual labour. But such *skills* are not what transform people into conscious participants in the struggle. What the petty-bourgeoisie is not trained in or equipped with by virtue of its membership in its class is how to *move* proletarians ideologically, politically, and organizationally into the class struggle, and how to train and transform them into people who could in turn *move* others. Leaders are those who transform people's consciousness into conscious action, and in turn, train those people to do this to other people. And in fact, the petty-bourgeoisie *tends* to have a major barrier to doing this effectively with the proletariat: the petty-bourgeoisie is thoroughly polluted with all sorts of anti-people ideas on a spectrum ranging from, at best, pity for the masses, and at its worst, outright contempt and fear of the masses.

Having useful technical skills for the struggle, being charismatic, being book smart and well-read do not necessarily translate into being able to really move someone into class consciousness and towards revolutionary resolve. Charisma without pedagogy is *demagogy*. Having book smarts without being able to clearly communicate with the masses is a stain of *petty-bourgeois intellectualism*. One's degree of effort or input doesn't necessarily show greater commitment than the next comrade: it can also reflect the extent to which petty-bourgeois class privilege affords more surplus time to devote to political work. Having the technical skills to run an organization without leading and elevating new people

in organization to do the same is a sign of *bureaucratism*. In short, we had quite a technocratic view of leadership.

Real communist leadership, we now see, entails recruiting and developing people; managing inter-personal conflicts as they arise while keeping politics in command and avoiding the pettiness that interpersonal conflicts can entail; soliciting criticisms and unearthing the discontents that reside below the surface of a comrade who is faltering; pushing comrades on the internal barriers holding them back. Being able to do all this while maintaining the discipline to be taken seriously and followed as a leader, possessing the humility to be able to learn from those you lead, and having the political resolve to guide all this in the direction of advancing proletarian struggle – this is what communist leadership entails.⁷

Our erroneous conception of leadership was just one aspect of our qualitative development that was not improved as we pursued growth without consolidation. As we expanded across multiple areas of work and regions across Canada with neither one successful project nor any common political project to learn through together only compounded the challenge of consolidating. Expansion without consolidation was a recipe for implosion, as we would learn in 2013. We should have channeled the resources necessary to advance our qualitative development much earlier. We have come to learn the truth in the phrase “fewer but better” both in terms of comrades and organizations.

⁷ For a full articulation of our new conception of communist leadership, which is one of the main fruits of our internal rectification, see the article developed by Comrades Jameel, Arulgurunathan, Val, and Anna “Communist Leadership, mass work, and building power,” further below in this issue of *Uprising*, pp.45-53.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE BOURGEOIS TREND AND OUR CONSOLIDATION, RECTIFICATION, AND TWO-LINE STRUGGLE (2014-2016)

By early 2014, it was becoming widely acknowledged that there were serious problems with our methods of work as our growth flipped into attrition across our various organizations and within RI itself. Even if the reasons people were giving for leaving political work were “personal” or incorrectly formulated political reasons, there was a clear trend of alienation from the work. **The bourgeois trend had failed. What was built was not sustained. And the majority of leading members of RI responsible for this trend turned their backs on party-building altogether without making a proper summation of their work or a self-critical evaluation of themselves. Among those who remained, some of us were propagators of, or went along with, the wrong line and wrong methods. Some others among us had better instincts all along, but failed to articulate these feelings into a proper intervention that could have brought forth a proletarian revolutionary line clearly and forcefully enough to change the organization’s trajectory.**

Given the very real crisis that we faced as an organization, those who remained or now found themselves in leading positions sought to slow things down and enter a phase of consolidation and assessment. But the moment of crisis also provided the opportunity for new erroneous trends to surface that we did not immediately recognize or challenge decisively: this was the challenge of an *identity politics* trend.

THE MOMENTARY REIGN OF IDENTITY POLITICS

In 2014, as we refocused, two entirely new errors presented themselves in RI. These errors reflected a shift in ideological balance in the organization as the departure of old members schooled in the organization’s orthodoxy departed while newer members who were still quite tainted by the identity politics and postmodernism that dominate academia and

activism were not sufficiently challenged. It is worth noting how quickly these ideas became a force within the organization in the period of crisis and uncertainty within the organization.

In the wake of the implosion of our central leadership body, the first mistake we made was to hastily reconstitute our leading bodies with members who were not leaders in the organization, and had no real experience in leading people. In the context of discussions on women's liberation and revolutionary feminism that happened to be unfolding in our organization at the time,⁸ the necessity to reconstitute some sort of leading body was expressed in the form of prematurely elevating a number of women into leadership positions they had no training and insufficient experience to take on. The elevation of very new members of RI into the Central Committee was unprecedented, and this decision would ultimately undermine the leadership of these women in the long run. At the time, there was a strong and legitimate feeling that we had to address the long-standing dearth of women leaders in the organization, but we did this in haste and with a germ of identity politics. There was this view going around – not clearly articulated, but a diffuse belief – that working-class women, by virtue of their experiences of patriarchal forms of oppression and exploitation, had deeper stakes in the revolution, and somehow this translated into being more prepared and committed to lead in a communist organization. This was an erroneous extrapolation of the analyses on the super-exploitation of women that were circulating within our organization at the time. We were horribly wrong, as practice would bear

8 As far back as 2009, the Central Committee had found itself at an impasse on how to analyze patriarchy and how to understand women's liberation. A decision was made to compile materials for a more extensive study, and this task was not completed by the comrade to which it was assigned. It took our leadership until 2012 to find a comrade with the experience to compile a study on these questions, and the results came in 2014 in the form of Comrade Stella's two ideological interventions dealing with material basis of patriarchy under capitalist imperialism and the path to women's liberation. Half of the content of *Uprising #5* deals with women's liberation, and this is where Comrade Stella's "The super-exploitation of women..." (pp.5-21) can be found. This was followed by the publication of Comrade Stella's "Revolutionary Feminism: Economic Transformation and Women's Liberation" in September 2014, later published in *Uprising #7*.

out. Nobody is born a communist, a revolutionary, or a leader. These short-cuts proved to be a damaging and regressive: it reflected an incorrect conception of leadership. Ultimately, we set a number of sister comrades up for failure by prematurely "advancing" them into positions they were not prepared for.

A second error arose in part (but certainly not wholly) as a consequence of the premature elevation of these comrades in the organization. This error was the mishandling of contradictions and criticisms amongst comrades that reflected the ascendance of identity politics in the organization that happened as a consequence of our mistakes in how we reconstituted our Central Committee. This is what happened: A humiliating, exhausting, and uncomradely "accountability process" was imposed on two comrades to resolve an outstanding tension between them that should have been resolved with one solid and decisive criticism and self-criticism (CSC) session. Some further context is necessary so there is no confusion or uncertainty about just how petty the content of this accountability process was in relation to the amount of energy and resources diverted to it.

WEAKNESSES IN OUR CSC PRACTICE

Prior to 2014, the processes of CSC in the organization were weak and ineffective – this despite 'Criticism and Self-Criticism' being a routine agenda item in our meeting schedule. The problem is that we didn't criticize our comrades deeply: we only addressed superficially the actions or behaviours that were worthy of criticism. We treated symptoms but not the disease. And the problem is that we didn't know how to *really* push comrades to overcome things that held back their ideological, political, and organization development as revolutionary communists. Or perhaps we simply didn't have the will to. In the absence of involvement in class struggle there was little impulse to actually *compel* people to transform. Not compel as in *force* comrades to adapt themselves more to the struggle. In our experience, when the stakes are high, many comrades threw themselves willingly and forcefully into the work, and those unable to rise to the occasion show their weaknesses or reveal what's

holding them back. Prior to 2015, we had no successful practice of actually *remoulding* comrades to revolutionary struggle, even though this was an internal organizational principle of RI. But this context of weak and ineffective CSC in the organization was merely the objective condition, but not the subjective factor for why contradictions were mishandled in 2014.

We had these two comrades in the organization, a male comrade and female comrade, who had mutual political work tracing back to before they joined RI or even entered its orbit. In this period, the brother comrade had on a few occasions made misogynous comments to the female comrade in their mutual work together before either of them had become Marxists, let alone communists.

Sometime after they had come into RI's orbit, in and around 2011, outstanding tensions between the two comrades became increasingly apparent and they were subjected to a series of mediated CSC sessions that brought their prior history to light. Nothing was revealed in the course of CSC that required any discipline for either comrade. The brother comrade self-criticized for long-past misogynous behaviours, and he took his own initiative to study and engage in workshops on feminism and patriarchy. The brother comrade, who happened to be from an oppressed nation, also raised gripes that the sister comrade had made what could be interpreted as national chauvinist comments, arguably made in jest (the female comrade was also non-white and from another national minority grouping), to him once or twice; and on another occasion hit him in a "playful" way that made him feel humiliated in front of other comrades. Basically, these comrades had long-standing tensions that were not being resolved, and interactions between them that pretty much any other combination of two comrades in the organization would have taken in jest were deeply incensing one another. The first set of mediated CSC sessions in 2011 ended with their prior interactions completely laid out but with each simply refusing to work with the other. The comrades assigned to their CSC sessions failed in getting these two comrades to bury the hatchet and move on. But given the low stakes of things in the organization at the time, given our absence of a connection to class struggles,

we just settled with assigning the two comrades to different areas of work. Most comrades in the organization didn't even recognize that these comrades didn't like each other.

Fast forward three years, to the period of our 2014 crisis at a time while we just so happened to be discussing patriarchy and women's liberation in RI. When a sign of this unresolved tension between the two comrades came to light in a general plenary of the organization, the conflict was immediately blown up into a massive crisis in a way that was framed as the long-standing suppression of women's leadership in the organization and a damning example of "patriarchy in the organization." Comrades who knew nothing about the prior interactions of these two comrades, who hardly knew these comrades, who were from regions of RI not shared by these two comrades, couldn't help but see a woman comrade who was "being held back" by having to work around a "patriarchal" comrade in the organization. In the middle of this general plenary, an unelected body calling itself the Emergency Women's Caucus (EWC) convened itself and decided to strip the brother comrade of speaking rights for the remainder of the plenary, so that the woman comrade would feel more comfortable in her participation. Additionally, the EWC mandated an "accountability process" to treat the matter as soon as possible. It is worth noting at this point in time that allowing the EWC to emerge was a mistake far more born out of liberalism than political immaturity in the organization: only one Central Committee member articulated opposition, while the rest, or at least those who knew better, failed to intervene to put this process to an end. There was a liberal instinct at play of not wanting to be "called out" by women leaders in the organization in a plenary which was treating the topic of women's liberation. Ironically, women's liberation was not discussed. Most of the plenary was derailed by the EWC.

The questions that this accountability process provoked ended up preoccupying the organization for a total of dozens and dozens of hours of meetings at all levels of the organization for more than the next half year. Lengthy investigation and discussion to the point of nausea revealed virtually nothing beyond what we already knew from the

CSC sessions in 2011. The resolution to this ridiculous diversion only came by way of an intervention from the Central Committee in the second quarter of 2015 after it had itself spent dozens of hours of debate on the Emergency Women's Caucus and a whole series of questions that it raised. In conclusion, after exhaustive struggle, the CC determined that the essential problem to *begin with* was that inadequate CSC in the organization failed to resolutely bring to end the tensions between the two comrades, and this problem was made far worse by the blunderous mishandling of the contradictions between them. Both comrades in question would eventually leave the organization.

There is some further context that is worth mentioning to understand the mood in the organization when this all unfolded. Many comrades at the time were quite vigilant about the erroneous methods of certain comrades past and present in the organization, specifically men; and an overly reductionistic "patriarchy in the organization" analysis was being imposed on the situation.

Just before the Emergency Women's Caucus (EWC) debacle, the organization had been experiencing serious political problems in one of its smaller regions. A petty-bourgeois white male member of the organization was leading mass work and was playing a leading role in a regional party unit with a dizzying array of errors and deviations. He was advancing a right opportunist program that was masked with left adventurist rhetoric, and was railroading through a political agenda in his region with a shocking degree of arrogance, narcissism and commandism.⁹ But the broader organizational problems that made his errors possible and led them to not be checked fast enough were not being considered by many who simply reduced this RI member's behaviours to a damning example of "patriarchy in the organization." The problem wasn't that this one member's only-belatedly criticized behaviours and actions defined the trend, but that our organization was expanding without consolidating, and unable to guide or give

⁹ First of all, it should be noted that the very existence of RI work in this region under such a reckless person was itself the final ill-fated expansionary move of RI just before the implosion of its leadership body and major attrition in late 2013 and early 2014.

proper leadership to its newer regions.

So in mid-2014, before the Emergency Women's Caucus (EWC) was called together in an organizational plenary, many were on edge about the outstanding criticisms against this male RI member. But, in fact, this RI member was actually being subjected to a CSC process that, due to the gravity of this member's errors, was more stringent than *any one else* had ever experienced in the organization. Everyone knew that this CSC process was unfolding. Ultimately, his unremoulded and unrepentant actions earned him the status of being the first person to have ever been expelled from the organization. For once, RI had actually drawn out a CSC to a proper conclusion.

But when the EWC emerged and took its position against another male comrade in the plenary, the background frustration was against this not-yet-expelled white petty bourgeois member who just happened to be absent from the plenary. But the major, major problem with the EWC's actions is how the male comrade who was in the plenary became a whipping boy for frustrations and concerns about patriarchy that had nothing to do with anything he did. He was humiliated and disciplined prior to any investigation by the EWC or before any explanation of past and recent attempts to resume CSC with the brother and sister in question.

It is noteworthy how in a period where we were in collective admission that there were serious problems in the organization, a new petty-bourgeois line smuggled itself into the organization that framed *everything* in terms of patriarchy and began casting the internal struggle as one between men and women. This momentary ascendance of identity politics not only unduly disciplined a comrade whose track record of commitment and discipline to the organization had actually been quite good, it also chewed up and spit out many of those pulled into its ludicrously misplaced "accountability process". Further, the female comrade of the two was also not treated in a comradely way, but rather as a victim: she was not being held to account for her own (minor and secondary) role in the unresolved conflict. But the fault principally lay with neither of the two comrades, but rather with the organization as a whole, the organization which failed to swiftly

resolve and treat their inter-personal conflict, and the organization which subsequently applied an erroneous identity politics, which failed to advance either comrade.

In practice, the identity politics line ended up being a completely liquidationist line in a period when we were working hard to rectify and course-correct our past errors. It was organizationally cannibalistic. The proletarian revolutionary line had to meticulously fight to untangle our past experiences in order to show at every step that our errors were not simply reducible to “patriarchy in the organization” and that such an analysis of nearly a decade of work would not push us forward. To a large extent, this very assessment is the product of pushing ourselves to scrutinize our work in order to overturn the erroneous conclusions that were being drawn about it, and to arrive at the correct conclusions and lessons.

The losses to the organization through this internal struggle included most of those who participated in the “accountability process,” as well as some others who were affected by the profoundly demoralizing waste of time and energy spent on this diversion. The brother who was party to the tensions ultimately quit, but only after dutifully participating in the misplaced discipline imposed upon him. The sister who was party to the tensions was not to blame for any of this. The organization failed her by not helping her to better articulate her criticisms properly and to uncover the deeper source of the frustrations she was experiencing in the organization. One of the biggest lessons taken away from our experience with these two comrades is that a communist organization must push people forward when they hit their limits, and we cannot fear pushing them away by struggle. But we’ve also come to see that when the stakes are low, we don’t tend to push one another to rise above pettiness, rise above our limitations, and take our commitments to the next level.

To be clear, on this whole experience of identity politics, we have not disavowed much of theoretical interventions that were being made at the time concerning women’s liberation and proletarian revolutionary feminism. There may have been a germ of some wrong ideas in those interventions. But these ideological interventions also had some positive

impact in guiding us back to the proletariat by elucidating the feminized nature of the lower and deeper ranks of the working class and revealing the role of reproductive labour in the production of surplus value. So the problem wasn’t that we dared talk about patriarchy and women’s liberation: this is not what constituted the identity politics deviation. The problem is how lines of struggle in the organization and how the substance of our problems came to be framed incorrectly under the influence of identity politics; how this politics led to the treatment of comrades in an antagonistic manner; and how the proletarian revolutionary line was ill-equipped and unprepared to deal with the destructive array of ideas and practices that were inflicted on our organization at a time when we were weakest and least prepared to combat it.

THE REASSERTION OF THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTIONARY LINE AND THE TWO-LINE STRUGGLE IN RI

By mid-2015, the identity politics line had been defeated after much internal struggle. Further attrition was the consequence of this struggle, but we found internal unity once again. But by the end of 2015, a seemingly new internal struggle was forming up around questions of methods of mass work, communist leadership, and our criteria for the development of our cadre.

In mid-2015, our organization published an internal document on cadre development and leadership that spelled out in no uncertain terms the criteria for the advancement of comrades through the mass work and in the party. At the time of its publication, this document had been consulted upon for six months already, and we have achieved unity on the document across the entire organization. But as we moved into implementation, a new struggle began unfolding in the organization concerning how to *apply* these principles of leadership and cadre development across the organization. A debate opened up around whether Central Committee members in RI should be given these responsibilities based on substantial relationships of leadership they have within and outside the organization – in recruiting, developing, guiding, mentoring both inside and outside RI – or whether mem-

bers could merely be elected on the basis of the merits of their ideological contributions. We had a long experience with ideologues in the organization having more formal leadership than their actual political capacities ever proved them worthy of.

At this point in the organization, mid-2015, this internal struggle was politically reducing itself into two politically opposing lines of march: would everyone in the organization be expected to immerse themselves in proletarian struggle in order to hone their cadre development, affirm their commitments, unite with the advanced masses, and recruit from the mass struggle; or would comrades with supposedly exceptional circumstances, comrades in smaller regions, and comrades with other “leadership” skills be granted exceptions, while those refocusing on immersing in the proletariat would do so on a voluntary basis? The line that we must all immerse ourselves in proletarian struggle and that only people who are developed through mass struggle can be recruited into RI is the one that won out. To have liberally meted out exceptions at a phase when our organization was small would have left our project dead in the water. We needed every single member of the organization to immerse in and learn from proletarian struggle. No specialists, no technocrats, no ideologues would be allowed to occupy positions in the leading body of the organization. On paper, we seemed to have cross-organization unity on this position.

But in practice, the internal alignments around the struggle concerning whether and how to pursue cadre development, how we establish communist leadership, and how to mobilize our resources for a consolidated push back into proletarian struggle, roughly paralleled how alignments played out during the struggle around identity politics. The key difference, however, is that with our struggle against identity politics, *virtually all of us erred*. That certain people may have been more avid flag-bearers of the identity politics line is less significant than the fact that we nearly all failed, especially our leading members, in effectively and decisively rooting out this petty-bourgeois line when it reared its head. To paraphrase Mao, when the revolution fails, we can only blame the vanguard, or the leadership

of the vanguard. Ultimately, after extensive internal struggle, the Central Committee, five of seven of whom were women, condemned the errors made in the name of women’s liberation. So, at least on paper, we overcame these errors all together and through protracted and painstaking ideological struggle, winning over even those who had been the most avid flag-bearers for the erroneous trend.

But when it came to the struggle around what leadership means and the necessity to consolidate our limited capacities into fewer and more effective mass interventions, what we saw was two diametrically-opposed and well-articulated lines square off against one another. A two-line struggle clearly emerged, with suspicious and bad faith beginning to characterize the exchanges amongst comrades. One line provided many well-articulated reasons for why ideologues and militants should be on the Central Committee, a convenient articulation for comrades resisting their own immersion into proletarian struggle. The line that prevailed, the proletarian revolutionary line, is that **what marks someone as a communist leader is the ability to *move people (from the masses to rank-and-file RI members) ideologically, politically, and organizationally into struggle, into organization, and into and through the ranks of the Party, and that the ONLY way forward for our organization was a complete and total return of all comrades to proletarian struggle. This party would have to be constituted alongside renewed proletarian mass struggle, our own cadre development could only be assured through this approach, and no leader in the organization would be recognized without being tested by these means.***

This struggle continued at the level of ideas for some time throughout 2016 until practice revealed the difference. Comrades that had most assiduously applied the line of returning to the proletarian masses and pursuing a strict, criteria-based approach to cadre development were able to reconstitute a dynamic and once-again growing RI branch, while comrades who resisted applying this line in their regions were experiencing ongoing stagnation if not big setbacks and implosions due to their own feet-dragging and reten-

tion of erroneous methods. By the end 2016, practice had clearly demonstrated which line was advancing the organization and which was holding it back, marking the end of the two-line struggle in the organization. It was a two-line struggle that should have been waged as far back as 2007/08, but which had finally won out after its validation in practice.

To be clear, at this point in time, the only success that the proletarian revolutionary line can claim is that it has overcome many of our past weaknesses in membership and cadre development in RI, and that guided by our new understanding of communist leadership, these new methods are yielding the most dedicated and resolved RI members we have ever seen in ten years of party-building. No one has ever claimed, as the sceptics maintain, that this line has made revolutionary “breakthroughs in mass struggle.” Not yet. This will take time. But if this will happen, it will happen through the initiative and leadership of the combative and highly-motivated cadre that are being moved by the resumption of the proletarian revolutionary line in RI, not by ideologues and technocrats who fear mass work and fear commitment to the masses.¹⁰

¹⁰ Again, for a full elaboration of this conception of communist leadership, one of the main products of our two-line struggle and internal rectification, is to be found in the article by Comrades Jameel, Arulgurunathan, Val, and Anna, “Communist Leadership, mass work, and building power,” in *Uprising* Issue #8 (Spring 2017).

A SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED

The central thesis of this assessment is that the weaknesses and errors of our party-building were heavily influenced by or a direct consequence of our untethering from the proletariat. Furthermore, the limitations we had as young revolutionary communists with no prior experience in revolutionary organization could not be overcome in the absence of a developing practice of proletarian struggle. To the extent that we managed to recognize some of these errors, weaknesses and limitations along the way,¹¹ they were not seen as a *system* of errors until we could trace their overall relationship to the principal error of untethering from the proletariat. The secondary errors and lessons that we learned as a consequence of our principal error have been treated above throughout this document, and are summarized immediately below as well. We have categorized them into ideological, political, and organizational categories for ease of recollection and apprehension.

IDEOLOGICAL

1. *Our theoretical work and program development reflected petty-bourgeois intellectualist methods.* Given the lack of class struggle(s) that the organization and its members were involved in, the research and writing for the program was not being driven by class struggle and ultimately it was reduced to an assignment for a single comrade with little to no input from the rest of the organization. We do not need a mere historico-sociological analysis of Canadian society. The research agendas of our party-building must be pushed forward by the beating heart of the class struggle(s) that our comrades are engaged in. This is how we will produce a class analysis to guide and a set of strategy and tactics to win the revolutionary war. *Participation in class struggle and knowing the proletariat directly must be a driving force in developing a new program for communist revolution.*
2. *We failed to sum up our practice before making major shifts in our political work.* We failed to clearly identify the

weaknesses, obstacles, or challenges we faced in our first base-building attempt. There was a fear to admit and confront the challenges we faced, because we didn't know what the answers were. But the consequence of not analyzing our experiences was that a defeatism concerning the organization of the proletariat was allowed to seep into the minds of some comrades, a petty-bourgeois anti-masses mindset emerged, and this quietly plagued the organization in an unspoken way for years to come. *Every major shift in political direction in the organization must go through a deep and thorough assessment amongst all members. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, errors. Claim no easy victories.*

3. *We failed to perform a class or situational analysis of new areas of work that were undertaken.* We had no sound strategic conception of how new areas of work would push our party-building forward to the next level, except for crudely establishing new recruiting grounds for RI. *Every major political move by revolutionary communists must be justified by a concrete analysis of the concrete conditions. Every new undertaking should present an analysis of the class forces at play and the prospects for advancing the mass struggle and building the party in that situation.*

POLITICAL

4. *We had no clear political Subject.* In abandoning a proletarian base area and in trying to build the party in spaces and places that were heterogeneous in class composition, we could not call into being the political Subject of the proletariat. Our appeals to the lowest and deepest ranks of the working-class in our propaganda and mobilizing rang hollow once we detached ourselves from the day-to-day struggles of proletariat. *Party-building will only to the extent that we constitute the proletariat as a political Subject through class struggle.*
5. *We had no clear and tangible class enemies in our work.* Our untethering deprived us of the base from which to fight a common class enemy. This lesson is distinct from the previous one because not every grouping of proletarians can be mobilized against clear and tangible class enemies. Our base, by contrast, offered up very clear and very tangible class enemies: a reviled slumlord that was out to displace a whole community; poverty pimps in the social service sector whose depoliticization of people's struggles could easily be exposed; the police whose constant harassment and profiling of youth could have been an added source of indignation to the main struggle in the neighbourhood; and politicians and bureaucrats at various levels of government frantically trying to preempt and head-off a resistance to the plans of developers and various levels of government. Concrete class enemies, when engaged directly by the masses in struggle, personify and reflect the wickedness and putrefaction of capitalism in general, and give the masses a tangible object to overcome our fragmentation. And when actively engaged through class struggle, class enemies bring forth in us the daily urgency and seriousness of our party-building that our studies can only teach us in the abstract. The proletariat cannot know itself, cannot become a class for itself, without knowing and engaging its class enemies. *The party must be built around and through the struggle against tangible class enemies.*
6. *We failed to foresee the extent to which a shifting class composition of the organization's areas of work towards non-proletarian masses would ripen grounds for opportunism.* This is not a position against engaging broadly with progressive non-proletarian class forces and class elements that can be allied with through united front work. But a stable base of proletarian struggle is necessary to focus and guide any work that appeals to progressive allies and revolutionary elements within the petty-bourgeoisie and worker elite. *The fight against opportunism in the organization is a losing battle when we lack a center of gravity for the orga-*

nization in proletarian struggle.

7. *We had a narrow and economistic interpretation of what it meant to “Serve the People” that amounted to nothing more than unfunded social service provision.* As the center of gravity of the organization shifted into non-proletarian segments of the masses, those in the organization who did remain connected to proletarian communities did not know how to break from this “Serve the people” economism. *The principal expression of our service to the people must be the ideological, political, and organizational work we do in the service of the class struggle. Economic struggles, mutual aid, and the fight for immediate gains cannot be ignored, but these must be the fruits of class struggle, not the handouts of communists.*

ORGANIZATIONAL

8. *We lacked sufficient focus and concentration of our cadre and members to effect a process of political accumulation, to learn from experience, and develop a deep camaraderie. We permitted too much “do-your-own-thing’ism” and small-project initiatives with no central guidance or strategic plan.* Once dispersed, it became increasingly difficult to produce assessments that could draw out meaningful lessons for the organization as a whole. We were working in qualitatively different places, all of which were arguably under-resourced with RI members and mass activists. We lacked a critical mass in most places we organized to make the impact we needed to make. Hence, the annual assessments that we did produce were mechanical and quantitative, they were produced more to convince ourselves and our members that we were growing (which we were), but they kept us from seriously interrogating the qualitative stagnation of our organization. *Focused and unified political projects with sufficient resources are essential for party-building at its infant stage. Focus and consolidation allows for the development of unity in our methods of work, a common organizational culture, and a camaraderie*

that can only be strengthened in common struggle.

9. *We failed to develop a pedagogical praxis from the start of our organization, and this problem was far from corrected as we deviated more and more into petty-bourgeois activism.* We placed book study far and above gaining an intimate understanding of the lived experiences that brought our comrades into communist organization to begin with. This was principally an organizational problem because it concerns how our comrades related to one another. By not analyzing well our own people, we could not clearly differentiate between people who came to communism out of pity for the exploited and oppressed versus those who come from the exploited and oppressed or strongly find identity with them. This difference was for a long time blurred. Our own experiences of oppression, exploitation and alienation should be the fires within us that drive us forward as revolutionaries. When we do not understand, harness, and temper these fires within us, they can burn us out and or burn down the wrong things around us. *We must seize upon the personal experiences of our comrades with exploitation, oppression, and alienation to become a motor force in their cadre development.*
10. *We confused quantitative advance for qualitative advance.* We prioritized recruitment into our mass organizations and RI above the qualitative development of our organizations. We ignored and put off the qualitative development of our people and the infrastructure required to assure the advancement of our people into communist cadre, because we were too busy with activism. We were unwilling to slow down quantitative growth in order to direct resources to the qualitative advancement of our organization, especially in terms of our educational and training capacities and making proper assessments. A fixation on quantitative growth also held us back from pursuing struggles within the organization that risked (and perhaps should have) pushed some people out. This was an easy error to persist with as we gravitated towards petty-bourgeois

activism and away from proletarian class struggle. The constant push to grow also meant that we spent precious resources on cross-country party-building without the ability to consolidate these networks and with little valuable direction to actually provide comrades from new regions. *Qualitative development and quantitative development are two aspects of growth, and we must ensure our qualitative development keeps up with quantitative growth.*

11. *We organized things not people.* Once disengaged from base-building and proletarian class struggle, we focused more and more on organizing things (events, rallies, meeting cycles, propaganda production deadlines) rather than people. While organizing things is part of organizing people, we lost sight of the people themselves. Our organizational endeavours must, in the final analysis, be subordinated to the ideological, political, and organizational development of our organizers at all levels. *The ideological, political, and organization development of our people must be made a priority at all levels of work. This is what it means for the masses the makers of history.*

12. *We had no coherent theory or practice of proletarian revolutionary mass organizing. Our thinking was marred by a spontaneist view of mass organizing.* We then backslid into petty-bourgeois methods of activism in the face of our challenges. We failed to see how much we still had to learn in the realm of agitation, social investigation, cadre development, and in differentiating the advanced from the intermediate and backward masses. We expected quick advances in our organizing without having a clue about how to organize the masses through painstaking social investigation, agitation, and struggle with the advanced and intermediate masses. We relied heavily on mobilizing over organizing and propaganda over agitation – typical petty-bourgeois activist errors. *Party-building needs the context of proletarian struggle to weed out the petty-bourgeois activist modes, hone the practice of effective mass organizing,*

and ultimately, to build the party. Party-building and strong mass organizing are inseparable from one another.

13. *The absence of a rich mass-line practice rendered more bureaucratic than democratic the centralism of our party-building.* Our party-building was not being driven by class struggle, not being informed by the input, action, or fighting spirit of proletarian masses. Lacking rich inputs “from the masses...”, whatever we put out “...to the masses” lacked the conviction, urgency, and faith that exists whenever we have been embedded in proletarian struggle. Our party-building agenda was not driven by the urgency of class struggle and the fire of a fight, but instead plans and intentions, however well-intentioned, coming from on-high that rank-and-file members just sort of went along with and couldn’t or didn’t much contest or engage with. By contrast, our organization’s return to proletarian struggle has lit a fire in our inner-party life, enlivening debate, discussion, and criticism in the organization. The elevation of the stakes, the reality of actual fights playing out that people have committed everything they can to, has raised the stakes of each and every inner-party discussion, *Democratic centralism requires mass line practice amongst the oppressed and exploited, and mass line practice requires democratic centralism of a communist organization.*¹²

14. *We had an erroneous view of political leadership that over-valued the role of technical know-how, charisma, book smarts, degree of effort, and the ability to perform technocratic organization tasks.* Proletarian leadership is the ability to move proletarians over a trajectory that begins with a materialist understanding of their situations towards class consciousness and revolutionary will. *Proletarian leadership means the demonstrated ability to move proletarians ideologically,*

12 This thesis is the subject of forthcoming essay by Comrade Amil, “Proletarian Democracy: The Other Side of the D.o.P.”, which has been subject to internal discussion and exchange for two years now. This article will be published in Volume #9 of *Uprising*, which could be released by late 2017.

politically, and organizationally.

15. *We allowed for the tokenization of women and took short-cuts towards the leadership development of women in RI.* Pushing a series of women into leading positions in the organization and assigning them responsibilities that they were not ready for (that no one would have been ready for at their level of organizational development), ultimately undermined the revolutionary development of the women comrades affected by these policies. Nobody, regardless of national background or gender, is an automatic communist, revolutionary cadre, or leader of anyone. Cadre development takes years of ideological, political, and organizational development that unfolds through struggle. A communist organization that is rooted in and leading proletarian struggles will have no problem recruiting and advancing a membership that reflects the proletariat, that is filled with women and members from oppressed nations and national minorities. *The corrective to this problem has been a uniform program of ideological, political, and organizational development for all comrades (regardless of identity group) in the context of a refocusing our party-building within the proletariat.*

16. *We mishandled contradictions amongst comrades.* We allowed for the treatment of comrades like they were representatives of the enemy within our organization. This came about in part due to the failure of our CSC processes to bring about a timely and decisive resolution to tensions, conflicts, or outstanding criticisms. We have learned to both not defer a criticism but also to relegate its treatment to the appropriate venue within our organization. Most importantly, we cannot evade the push that's required on a comrade to advance them as a proletarian revolutionary. Just as there is no long-term stasis in class struggle, there is no stasis in one's development as a revolutionary. If criticism reveals critical shortcomings in a comrade, they must be addressed without delay. But this can only be done in a context where there is deep camaraderie: revolutionary

trust and revolutionary love cultivated and tested in struggle is the foundation for deep ideological and political remoulding. *Through revolutionary trust and revolutionary love born in struggle, we must not fear pushing our comrades forward, with all due support, and we cannot hold back for fear of pushing comrades out.*

* * *

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

These errors and their corresponding lessons, each in their singularity and ultimately as a totality, came into sharp focus as we returned to a proletarian base to develop a combative proletarian class politics. The ultimate corrective for us has been a return to proletarian class struggle. This point cannot be over-emphasized. Returning to a new proletarian base has been the crucible for reconstituting Revolutionary Initiative from the ground up. It is how we've placed politics – *proletarian politics* – back in command of RI.

To all those who are reading this who were not party to our experiences but have been or are involved with their own party-building projects: the only reason this summation has been made a public document is to share the mistakes we've made and the lessons we've learned so that other comrades and organizations in the revolutionary camp may be able to address any parallels in their own experiences faster and more resolutely than we did.

To all those once involved with RI, and perhaps alienated or unconvinced by our previously erroneous methods: you are the casualties of a learning curve that we will not easily forgive ourselves for, and we hope many of you will return to revolutionary struggle.

To all those who played their own leading part in authoring the above-named methods and errors only to disappear when your ideas proved bankrupt, rest assured that we don't blame you, no more than we can blame Nikita Khrushchev or Deng Xiaoping for revisionism. We are proletarian revolutionaries, and as such when bourgeois ideas and trends take hold, we can only blame the ill-equipped thought and practice of proletarian revolutionaries for letting this happen. We hold no grudges. We can only hold to account our failure to articulate a correct, timely and proletarian revolutionary line against incorrect, outmoded, and/or bourgeois lines.

And to all those who remained to pick up the pieces and find a way forward in the midst of all the confusion, uncertainty, and setbacks in 2014-2015; to all those who persisted through tough periods of assessment with

only a distant promise of revitalized mass work; to the rank-and-file and newly-emergent cadre of RI: you are exemplars, you are torch-bearers of a new people and a new revolutionary communist movement. You are the most serious, disciplined, and effective comrades we have known because you are the product of the correct line, the proletarian revolutionary line, firmly in command. This summation has been for you more than anyone else.



THINGS DONE CHANGED

Part II of IV in

The Specter that Still Haunts:

Locating a Revolutionary Class Within Contemporary Capitalism-Imperialism

by Kenny Lake

In Part I of this series, "What it is, What it Ain't," Kenny Lake drew upon the analyses of Marx and Engels concerning the multifaceted process of proletarianization in order to provoke a reconsideration of where a revolutionary class can be located in the world today.

In this essay, Part II, Kenny Lake examines the chaotic uprooting of hundreds of millions of people in the world in recent decades by speculative and financialized capitalism-imperialism, interrogating what the processes giving rise to this world-historic dispossession means for the proletariat that it leaves in its wake and raising the question of what this means for the future content and form of people's wars.

In Part III, Lake explores the Maoist-led people's wars since the 1980s in Peru, the Philippines, and India for links between the emergence of a revolutionary subject and processes of dispossession. Lake narrows in on the significance of Davao City, Mindanao, Philippines and Lima, Peru, as critical urban centers within the wider people's wars in those countries at the time, provoking considerations concerning the significance of global slums in the future of people's wars.

Comrade Kenny Lake's essay will conclude in Part IV with an examination of what these global transformations may mean for parts of the US today, from the formerly-industrialized regions now swollen with massive reserve armies of labour to the global cities reproduced by an expanding immigrant proletariat alongside the internal colonies and oppressed nations within America's borders.

-Uprising Editor

enterprise.

The functioning of finance has changed considerably in the last several decades. Saskia Sassen describes the new “capacity of finance to develop enormously complex instruments that allow it to securitize the broadest ever, historically speaking, range of entities and processes; further, continuous advances in electronic networks and tools make for seemingly unlimited multiplier effects.”⁵ Choices about where to invest capital are now often arrived at by advanced mathematical algorithms⁶— worlds apart from the rational social planning needed for production to serve humanity’s all-around development. Furthermore, finance capital increasingly divorces economic decisions from material realities, resulting in intense and intensely destructive speculation. Sassen notes that “outstanding derivatives, a form of complex debt that derives its value from another source, ranging from other types of debt to material goods such as buildings and crops” “are presently the most common financial instrument” now valued at “more than one quadrillion.”⁷ She goes on to describe how “securitization,” such a prominent feature of finance today, “involves the relocation of a building, good, or debt, into a financial circuit where it becomes mobile and can be bought and sold over and over in markets near and far.”⁸

The transition to a more freely speculative functioning of finance that can extract profits from just about anything came about through the policy changes wrought under the neoliberal turn in the capitalist-imperialist system. Harvey summarizes radical transformations within the financial and banking system, including the “interlinking of global stock and financial trading markets” in 1986 that meant “banks could operate freely across borders.” In the US, dismantling the “distinction between investment and deposit banking” “further integrated the banking system into one giant network of financial power.”⁹ The structural

5 Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 8–9, 12.

6 Ibid., 119.

7 Ibid., 117–18.

8 Ibid., 118.

9 David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010),

adjustment programs (SAPs) forced on the oppressed nations by the IMF / World Bank beginning in the 1980s smashed the doors wide open for finance to move surplus-capital into these oppressed nations and for increasingly speculative investment schemes, resulting in vast extractions of wealth. Furthermore, the massive debt owed by oppressed nations to foreign lenders, which SAPs enforced repayment of, made finance capital an all the more powerful lever over the economies of the oppressed nations, including through debt-servicing operations. Sassen points out that “Africa’s debt service payments reached \$5 billion in 1998; that year, for every \$1 in foreign aid African countries paid \$1.40 in debt services...in 2006 a total of 144 countries had debt amounting to \$2.9 trillion and paid \$573 billion to service that debt.”¹⁰

Paradoxically, in order to understand the material changes affecting the lives and social relations of humanity, the fantasy-like operations of finance capital form a crucial starting point. The movements of capital commanded by finance from one corner of the globe to another have the effect of siphoning one section of people into the reserve army of labor and subjecting another to the process of proletarianization. They result in the ruin and dislocation of previous modes of economic life and migrations of the people who are ruined and uprooted. And as land acquisitions and resource extraction become some of the most profitable (and newly speculative) ventures, those whose land is acquired and whose resources are extracted are drawn into antagonistic conflict with the motions of capital accumulation.

The fantasy-like operations of finance capital thus have a material life in the nightmares they create in the real world. To understand this material life, we can examine transformations in the organization of the global economy over the last several decades. Doing so requires going beyond simply comprehending the basic division between imperialist nations, where finance capital is concentrated,

19–20.

10 Sassen, *Expulsions*, 91. On SAPs, see Cope, *Divided World Divided Class: Global Political Economy and the Stratification of Labour Under Capitalism* (Montreal: Kersplebedeb. 2012), 125; and Sassen, *Expulsions*, 83–91.

and oppressed nations, where finance capital operates as an external power.¹¹ It is through analyzing the specific forms of organization of and processes set in motion by the motions of capital that classes and class antagonisms can be located. Over the last several decades, a few broad trends stand out:

- The emergence of global cities as centers that organize the global economy and where finance capital in particular is accumulated.
- The re-organization of production on a global scale that has given rise to export-processing zones in the oppressed nations as new locations for production and sites of proletarianization.
- The casting off of entire sections of people into a vast and seemingly permanent reserve army of labor as a consequence of de-industrialization (especially but not only in imperialist nations) and the ruin of previous modes of economic life in the oppressed nations (with SAPs dealing the final blow in this regard).
- Migration within oppressed nations and from oppressed nations to imperialist nations both to serve the labor needs of capital and, in the case of the massive slums in the cities of the oppressed nations, as a dislocated surplus population without prospects of employment.

¹¹ Though it remains important to insist on the terminology of imperialist / oppressed nations to describe a basic division in the world in opposition to terms such as Global North / Global South, First World / Third World, core / periphery, or developed / developing countries, as these terms do little to explain the basic division or the relationship between the two sides of that division, and, in the case of “developed / developing countries,” in fact obfuscates rather than explains. However, to rest content with categorizing countries as imperialist or oppressed is to accept a shallow analysis lacking specificity and out of touch with reality. Increasingly more countries display aspects of both categories, with China as a prime example where foreign capital operates within its borders to extract superprofits through superexploitation, while at the same time China develops an imperialist relationship over a number of countries in Africa, and has furthermore begun to flex its military strength in opposition to US imperialism. Moreover, putting a country into a category does little to develop a revolutionary strategy based on the concrete conditions of that country. And given the blurry line between imperialist and oppressed nation in increasing instances as well as the worldwide sell-out of national bourgeoisies in the oppressed nations to imperialism after the end of formal colonialism, it is questionable how applicable the old paradigm of national liberation in alliance with the national bourgeoisie is in the world today.

- Increasing conflicts over land and resources as both become more scarce and capital moves in to profit from resource extraction and land acquisition, often expelling populations as a result.

In what follows, these broad trends will be elucidated with an eye towards the possibilities within them for mobilizing proletarians for communist revolution.

GLOBAL CITIES

A basic philosophical error in much analysis of globalization is to treat centralization and decentralization as mutually exclusive opposites rather than as a unity of opposites in which both aspects are dependent on one another. The incredible mobility of capital and the decentralization of production that characterizes the world economy together with the deregulation and free market fundamentalism that allows capital, at least in the oppressed nations, to trump national sovereignty can make it appear as though no central force holds globalized capitalism together. However, the global assembly and distribution line that links worldwide decentralized production requires coordination and command, and the market in which capital freely moves requires centers through which finance can speculate on and dictate investment. Saskia Sassen has identified global cities, such as New York, London, and Tokyo, as the centers “from where the world economy is managed and serviced.”¹² These global cities are characterized by an agglomeration of activities, in particular of finance and production services, with global reach.

The concept of global city provides several crucial analytic insights. First, it gives a specificity to how imperialism operates. Second, it helps to explain socioeconomic differentiation within imperialist nations, with global cities like New York economically ascendant and consequently characterized by a different class structure than a de-industrialized and economically depressed city such as Detroit. Communist organizing in the latter would require particular attention to mobilizing the surplus population

¹² Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 127. For a full elucidation of the concept of the global city, see Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

that is being deprived of means of employment and even housing and water. In the former, by contrast, the proletariat consists, to a substantial degree, of immigrants working in services.

This points to a third insight of the global city concept: the management and coordination of the global economy and the functioning of finance and financial and production services has to be produced and reproduced in the spatial location of the global city. Office buildings need to be constructed, cleaned, and maintained; the class managing, speculating on, and servicing the global economy needs to be fed and transported; and the gentrified lifestyles of this class require labor-intensive production of gourmet foods, clothes, and other trinkets as well as servants to carry out daily tasks of reproduction such as cleaning and child care. Furthermore, while the overall trend is for production to be “offshored” from the imperialist nations, some aspects of production, for one reason or another, make more sense to take place in the global cities, whether these be sweatshops producing high-end fashion or specialized electronics manufacturing. All this requires a proletariat that is amenable to flexible, informal, and labor-intensive employment and can be expected to refrain from the disruptive activity of class struggle. In the global cities, this proletariat has been largely recruited from immigrants who, especially but not only when undocumented, meet the above requirements.¹³

In conceptualizing the immigrants who clean offices and gentrified homes, cook food, fly through busy traffic on bicycles to make deliveries, serve as nannies and maids to the rich, and work in sweatshops and low-wage manufacturing as a new section of the proletariat, we call into question certain conventional “Marxist” wisdom. Namely, much of this proletariat is engaged in reproduction and/or functions as a servant class rather than as “productive” workers in the industrial sense. This is all the more reason to move away from mechanical notions that privilege some specific forms of productive activity as somehow portending to revolutionary consciousness and fail to recognize the crucial role of reproduction

13 This summary of production, reproduction, and the proletariat in the global cities draws from Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and its Discontents* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 86–91, 111, 121–29, 137–47; and Sassen, *Mobility*, 22, 145, 157–60, 174, 187.



Top Image: New York’s financial district. Middle and Lower Images: Who feeds who? A nanny and food delivery workers in New York.

and service to capital accumulation.¹⁴

Furthermore, the largely immigrant proletariat in the global cities presents several strategic advantages for communist revolution. First, owing to its immigrant status, it is politically marginalized and the bourgeois state makes little attempt to incorporate it into its hegemony or provide it with means to advance its position within the capitalist order. For those reasons, combined with the oppression it faces in the dimensions of culture, language, and social position, it remains a class in antagonistic conflict with capital. Second, it is an exemplification of one process of socialized labor—migration—and an embodiment of the proletariat as an international class, and brings a myriad of experience with imperialism from its countries of origin. Third, since crucial members of the international bourgeoisie and the central nervous system of capital are dependent, for their daily functioning, on this section of the proletariat, it occupies a strategic position in the revolutionary struggle with a particular capacity for disruption on a grand scale.

One of the most impressive and innovative tactics of the communist revolutionary people's wars in Peru and then Nepal was the shut-downs of Lima and Kathmandu. This tactic involved the coordination of both communist military organization and a mass of supporters to bring life to a halt in the major centers of population and bourgeois political power. It served as a demonstration of the power of and support for the people's wars in the urban centers and as a form of dress rehearsal for the intended goal of seizing nationwide power. Political scientist Cynthia McClintock describes the most successful urban shut-down by Sendero Luminoso in 1992:

14 For an example of the conception of productive versus unproductive workers I am critiquing, see Cope, 174–182, who says that “the fundamental class antagonism in capitalism is between the producers of surplus-value and the capitalists who receive it in the first instance” (176) and considers “unproductive” workers to thus be parasites on production. By contrast, in her article “The Super-Exploitation of Women and Developing a Revolutionary Mass Line,” *Uprising: Journal of Revolutionary Initiative* 5 (Spring 2014): 5–21, Stella B argues for a class analysis that considers reproduction to be no less important than the production of surplus-value, and thus puts the reproductive labor disproportionately performed by women at the heart of capitalist production.

On 22 and 23 July, the insurgents' two-day armed strike paralyzed Lima. Roads and rail links to the highland interior [of Peru] were cut by bombs. The major avenues from shanty towns into Lima were blocked by stones and burning tires. Public transport halted. Most offices, shops, and schools closed. As the Shining Path enforced the strike by bombs and assaults, some forty people were killed and roughly one hundred were wounded.¹⁵

Were urban shut-downs to be employed by communists in the global cities at the center of imperialism, their effect would be magnified. Given the existence of a vast immigrant proletariat in the global cities, this tactic is a real possibility were this immigrant proletariat mobilized under communist leadership.

EXPORT PROCESSING ZONES

A key part of what the bourgeoisie in the global cities commands, coordinates, and services is the global process of production. Several factors have coalesced in recent decades that enable capitalist production to function as a dispersed global process and for the allocation of capital to parts of the world where labor and other costs of production are the cheapest. Aside from the greater fluidity of capital already discussed, these factors include technological innovations that allow for a global assembly line in which different parts are produced in different locations, advances in transportation such as containerization, advances in electronic communications, and, perhaps most importantly, the availability of cheap labor and production facilities provided by the SAPs and neoliberal policies enforced on the oppressed nations.¹⁶

What all this means is that the production of commodities, especially in growth industries such as electronics and in labor-intensive production such as the garment industry, increasingly takes place mostly in the oppressed nations in what are broadly referred to as export-processing zones (EPZs). These are newly industrialized zones with an array of production facilities set in motion by

15 Cynthia McClintock, *Revolutionary Movements in Latin America: El Salvador's FMLN & Peru's Shining Path* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998), 88.

16 Harvey, *Enigma*, 14–16.

foreign capital and employing a vast army of proletarians in labor-intensive low-wage work producing or assembling commodities for export largely to imperialist nations. We can add alongside these EPZs the rise of plantations and large-scale capitalist agriculture in the oppressed nations producing food and cash crops for export. For our purposes, what is most important about these EPZs is that they constitute one key process of proletarianization that has resulted in over 80% of the world's industrial workforce now being located in the oppressed nations.¹⁷

This process of proletarianization has generally involved the following route. SAPs wreak havoc on traditional economic modes when subsistence and peasant agriculture lose government subsidies and price supports, restrictions on imports are stripped away and domestic production can no longer compete with foreign goods, and state provisions such as healthcare, education, and public-sector employment are shattered. This results in a large pool of people unable to sustain themselves in the ways they did previously, and thus forced to migrate to wherever capital will employ them.¹⁸ The drastic increase in foreign direct investment (FDI) from the imperialist countries to the oppressed nations since the 1960s is one indication of capital moving to where it can create and best profitably exploit proletarians.¹⁹ Furthermore, capital's ability to exploit labor in this situation has been aided by conditions stipulated by SAPs that destroy any barriers to exploitation, as well as the neoliberal policies which include an enforcement of capital's freedom to exploit labor in that God of bourgeois ideals called the free market. This is perhaps best exemplified in those EPZs known as "special economic zones" in the oppressed nations, in which state policy eliminates barriers to investment such as tariffs and labor laws. These special economic zones were pivotal to the restoration of capitalism in China and to China's re-integration into the world imperialist system.

The proletariat in these EPZs is marked by several distinctive features. First, it is generally made up of newly proletarianized

people dispossessed and dislocated from their previous modes of economic life, which were often peasant and subsistence farming. Second, those who work in the EPZs generally arrived there through regional migration, often from rural areas to the newly industrialized zones. Third, EPZs heavily recruit young women, who, from the standpoint of capital, are a more docile workforce owing to the patriarchy prevailing in their societies. These young women are frequently laid off when they reach their mid-twenties, as by that time they are no longer seen as useful to capital both due to the physical exhaustion of intense labor and their growing propensity for struggle after several years of exploitation. Unemployed and disconnected from their previous modes of life and geographic location through the process of proletarianization, these women then have little choice but to migrate further in search of employment.²⁰ Fourth, labor conditions in the EPZs are among the worst in the world. Besides the extremely low wages, intensity of labor, and absurdly long work hours, the numerous factory fires, facilitated by shoddy construction and made more deadly by locked factory doors and no safety measures, that have killed thousands in the garment production sites of Bangladesh in recent years highlight the expendable position—to capital—of those laboring in the EPZs. Furthermore, these human incinerations are a stunning indication that capitalism, far from providing continual forward progress for humanity, perpetually repeats horrors of previous centuries. Fifth, the EPZs allow for little possibilities of successful struggles, on the part of the proletarians they employ, to improve their conditions of existence. Aside from the active role of the repressive state apparatus in stamping out resistance, capital is free to move production to another EPZ should resistance force it to pay higher wages or improve working conditions. Those cutting edge technologies and must-have trinkets for people in the imperialist nations known as iPhones, iTablets, etc. have been made cheaply available in part through the practice of changing locations anytime those producing them in China manage to win a struggle for higher wages.

These features present several strategic advantages for mobilizing proletarians in the

¹⁷ Cope, 122.

¹⁸ Sassen, *Mobility*, 129–31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14, 99–102.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 114–18.



This chart shows the proportion of women that make up the labour of export processing zones in various countries. Data from “2011-12 Progress of the World’s Women Report,” from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

EPZs for the aims and practices of communist revolution. First, given that typical reformist struggles for improving conditions of daily life—higher wages, better working conditions, official unions—are largely foreclosed, the immediate and pressing need for revolution should be much more palpable to these proletarians. This is in part because these proletarians confront, in their daily lives and struggles, not just their immediate exploiter, who is often a local capitalist that the imperialist bourgeoisie has outsourced production to, but the machinations of capital on a world scale. They can be left unemployed in a heartbeat should capital find a more profitable location to outsource production to. It is only communist class-consciousness that can make sense of this situation and open up pathways for struggle aimed at eradicating the forces that perpetuate it, which in this case principally involves the social anarchy of production. Furthermore, given the active deployment of the repressive state apparatus anytime these proletarians put up resistance, there is fertile ground for violent rebellion, as has occurred in the Bangladeshi garment industry in recent

years, and for revolutionary armed struggle. This is made all the more of an immediate possibility considering the desperate conditions of daily life for those laboring in the EPZs.

Second, proletarians in the EPZs are potentially much more prone to revolutionary class-consciousness given they have recently undergone the process of dispossession and dislocation from their previous modes of life and confront not just the bitter experience of exploitation but also the volatile effects of the social anarchy of production, in this case the movements of capital to wherever production is cheapest. For these proletarians, there is generally no going back to their previous lives, as the peasant and subsistence farming they came from is no longer a viable option, and working in the EPZs has separated them, socially and culturally, from their previous lives. Furthermore, proletarians in EPZs exemplify the processes of socialized labor in several ways. They arrived in the EPZs through migration. They work in manufacturing facilities often employing large numbers of laborers, and they live in zones that concentrate a large

number of proletarians within a single geographical location. They are part of production processes that are often international in character, with components of commodities produced in various places and brought together in a global assembly line, and, owing to the presence of foreign capital, they form social and cultural links with imperialist countries. All this makes them an embodiment of the international character of the proletariat and provides raw material for shaping an internationalist proletarian class-consciousness.

Third, the feminization of the proletariat in the EPZs adds more fuel for revolutionary fire. Since communist revolution aims not at simply ending the exploitation of labor but at radically transforming society in all its dimensions in order to do away with all existing oppressive social relations, eradicating patriarchy is an integral part of the proletariat's historic mission. Moreover, putting the struggle against patriarchy and active mobilization of women, including in leadership roles, at the heart of communist revolution further radicalizes the revolutionary struggle. Not only do the EPZs around the world brutally exploit young women, but they also often foster some of the most violent assertions of patriarchy. One particularly chilling example is Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, just south of the US border. Juárez became an EPZ during the 1990s as foreign capital moved in and set up maquiladoras (sweatshop factories), which employed large numbers of young women migrating from impoverished rural areas. Since then, hundreds of these young women have been kidnapped, raped, and murdered, with the Mexican state doing nothing to stop it.²¹ These and other horrors are all the more reason for the proletarian women working in the EPZs to become a central part of the revolutionary struggle, and in doing so will strengthen that struggle. Both the state repressive violence and social patriarchal violence directed against these proletarian women renders revolutionary violence the only requisite response.

21 All this is perhaps best illustrated in the movie *Ciudad Juárez*.

SLUMS NOT JOBS²²

Migration within the oppressed nations does not take place only or even mainly because capital is in need of labor at specific locations. Much of the rapid urbanization of the population in the oppressed nations since the 1960s has been driven not by the labor needs of capital, but rather by the dislocation of rural populations through the SAPs and consequences of neoliberalism described above. In addition, the collapse of formal colonialism brought about an end to previous restrictions on population mobility as well as population displacements owing to anti-colonial conflicts and internal power struggles.²³ Unlike the EPZs, the slums that have increasingly defined cities in the oppressed nations are generally not sites of growth and new production in the world economy, but instead are full of people left to fend for themselves in whatever ways they can. Consequently, slum residents are often underemployed, unemployed, and/or work in the informal economy without any guarantees of stability or protections. Lacking basic infrastructure such as sewage systems and clean water and wracked by disease, the human surplus population packed into the slums today far eclipses that described by Engels in his 1845 work *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

To understand the growth of, prevalence of, and conditions in slums today, a few facts and statistics from Mike Davis' *Planet of Slums* are worth citing:

- As of 2005, a conservative UN estimate is that there are over one billion people living in slums worldwide. In the oppressed nations, 78.2% of the urban population lives in slums. In Nepal, that portion is 92%.
- In Lunda, Mapute, and Cochabamba, at

22 In case the parody of social-imperialism implicit in this heading is lost on anyone, a common sight at anti-war protests in imperialist countries is banners reading "jobs not war," "healthcare not warfare," "money for jobs and education, not for war and occupation," etc. Besides the moral bankruptcy of such slogans (would the war be okay if there was full employment, healthcare, and education for residents of the imperialist country waging that war?), they become all the more empty when considering the vast human surplus populations with no prospects for jobs, healthcare, and education under the rule of capital.

23 Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London & New York: Verso, 2006), 55–61.

least two-thirds of “residents earn less than the cost of their minimum required nutrition.”

- The slum of Neza in Mexico City had a population of ten thousand in 1957 and approximately three million today. This is indicative of the magnification of slum populations worldwide since the 1960s.
- “Mega-slums” have emerged especially in Latin America and Africa in which several shantytowns merge to create one continuous slum belt, with Lima and Mexico City as prime examples.
- Slums are generally crammed spaces of high-population density. In Dhaka, 70% of the population live on 20% of the land.
- Slum residents are frequently subject to mass evictions to make way for urban development, special events such as international sports competitions, or for security reasons.²⁴

The slum dwellers of the oppressed nations are a vast and seemingly permanent

²⁴ Ibid., 23, 25–27, 95–98, 98–114,

reserve army of labor that capital has no use for in the foreseeable future. Eking out an impoverished existence in occupations such as rag-pickers, rickshaw drivers, street vendors, sweatshop workers, crime, and beggars, slum residents are the most concentrated expression of the growth of the informal economy under global capitalism in recent decades. Mike Davis notes that “the global informal working class...is about one billion strong, making it the fastest-growing, and most unprecedented, social class on earth.”²⁵

If we center our conception of the proletariat on dispossession and include the reserve army of labor as a component just as crucial to the formation of the proletariat as that component which works in production, slum-dwellers emerge as one pivotal and populous part

²⁵ Ibid., 178. While the slums are the largest concentration points of the informal economy, Sassen points to informalization as a larger trend structuring employment. In the global cities, for example, many of the low-wage service and down-graded manufacturing jobs are “off the books” or lack any formal contracts (*Globalization*, chapter 8).



A scene from the Kibera slum in Nairobi, Kenya.

of the proletariat today. Given their desperate conditions of daily life and the fact that slums cannot be replaced with housing fit for human beings short of social planning on a massive scale that includes providing the right to work in meaningful, productive, and non-exploitative positions for those now residing in the slums, slum-dwellers have an immediate and irreconcilable antagonism with the overall functioning of capital. All this makes them a potentially powerful force in the revolutionary struggle, even if the often sharp social contradictions among slum-dwellers forced into a daily competition for survival with each other and the fact that many of them sustain themselves through individual economic activity rather than socialized labor pose challenges for organizing slum-dwellers for the larger aims of communist revolution. While these real difficulties will be addressed below, here it is worth pointing out some of the strategic advantages slums present for revolutionary people's war.

First, the dense populations of slums facilitate collective struggle and organization on a territorial level. Second, the informality of not just economic activity but also housing and political status allows for the possibility of setting up voluntary communal forms of living and economic survival among those masses committed to the revolutionary struggle that are outside the parameters of the bourgeois state. During the height of the people's war in Peru in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Sendero Luminoso took advantage of this possibility and organized groups of its supporters to claim parts of Lima, construct housing for themselves, work and/or meet their subsistence needs collectively to the degree possible, and live according to communist morality. These became important base areas for the revolution right within the slums surrounding Peru's urban center of power, making the 1992 armed strike described above possible, and served as models of the revolutionary future to those in Lima's shantytowns.²⁶

Third, slums present the possibility of

26 For a vivid account of life and conflict with the bourgeois state in Raucana, Sendero Luminoso's first established settlement in the Lima metropolitan area, see Simon Strong, *Shining Path: Terror and Revolution in Peru* (New York: Times Books, 1992), 260–63.

revolutionary armed struggle in the urban domain, which is all the more crucial given that the urban population of the world now outnumbers the rural population. The bourgeoisie is well aware of this possibility, with the US military paying increasing attention to developing doctrine and practice for what it calls Military Operations in Urbanized Terrain (MOUT). Mike Davis sums up bourgeois military concerns in regards to slums:

- Unlike urban centers, the slums are sprawling geographically, which makes them difficult targets to bomb.
- The built environment of slums, with narrow roads and passages and informally constructed housing, make them difficult terrain for armies with modern equipment and conventional military organization to navigate. The US military faced this difficulty and, as a consequence, accumulated many casualties in Sadr City.
- The youth of the slums, lacking prospects for a meaningful future, pose an insurgent threat, especially when they have grown up around violence, weapons, and gangs.
- Given that the repressive state apparatus does not have easy reach into the slums, there is the real possibility of liberated zones emerging in the slums.²⁷

Communists are unfortunately far behind the bourgeoisie in developing military doctrine for revolutionary warfare in the slums. In this regard, the experiences in the urban domain during the people's wars in Peru and the Philippines are in need of examination, and non-communist urban military conflicts, such as the Sandinista's urban military campaigns and more recent conflicts in the Middle East, should also be mined for their lessons. Of course, most importantly, new endeavors in practice are required.

From the beginnings of capitalist production in England, surplus populations have posed a threat to bourgeois rule given their instability, desperate need to find means of survival, and exclusion from the economic and

27 Davis, 202–206. See also Stephen Graham, *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism* (London & New York: Verso, 2011).

social functioning of society. This need for social control will be explored in greater detail in relation to deindustrialization within the US in part four. In regards to the slums, the bourgeoisie's fear of the urban human surplus it has created is in dire need of being made palpable through communist organization and revolutionary struggle.

JAMES BOND

**ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF HUMANITY
FOR ONCE?**

The need for the minerals used in new technologies and industrial production, the oil that continues to power the global economy, and the food and industrial crops and water sustaining a growing population requires that capital continually acquires land and resources. As both become increasingly scarce due to nearly two-hundred years of industrial capitalism and the environmental destruction it continues to perpetuate, conflicts over land and resource extraction put new sections of the population in direct antagonism with the processes of capital accumulation.

In recent years, foreign direct investment has shifted away from manufacturing and to the primary sector (mining, crops, oil, etc.), especially in Africa.²⁸

New financial instruments, such as derivatives, have aided in making land acquisition a particularly profitable venture for finance capital, including through speculation. Saskia Sassen

describes a drastic increase in land acquisitions by foreign countries and firms occurring around 2006, resulting in two-hundred million hectares in land acquisitions from 2006–

²⁸ Sassen, *Expulsions*, 106–7.

2011.²⁹ After 2006, “it is crops for biofuels that now account for most of the acquisitions,” with palm oil plantations providing green energy for the European Union.³⁰ Since palm oil can only be produced profitably on large plantations of at least four or five thousand hectares with processing facilities and easy access to transportation, this has resulted in massive seizures of communal and smallholding farm lands in Indonesia in particular.³¹

It is not only the long-established imperialist nations responsible for these land grabs, but also “oil-rich Gulf States” and “populous and capital-rich Asian countries.”³² As acquired land in Africa becomes the bread basket for foreign populations, the results include, in Ethiopia, the perverse co-existence of foreign land acquisition for food production by Saudi Arabia with massive hunger and malnutrition among Ethiopians requiring foreign food aid.³³ As global warming creates draughts in places like California and Western Australia and water, the most important sustenance of human life, becomes a rarer and more valuable commodity, control of water resources in the oppressed nations is usurped by foreign nations and firms, wreaking havoc on the water supply of those oppressed nations.³⁴ Thus control over water resources played a crucial role in

fostering recent radical movements among the basic masses in Bolivia and in the election of Evo Morales. As an eco-friendly capitalist grabbing control of Bolivia's water supply, Dominic Greene, the chief villain in



Deforestation makes way for a palm oil plantation. This site is in Sarawak, Borneo, Malaysia.

²⁹ Ibid., 80.

³⁰ Ibid., 96, 99–100.

³¹ Ibid., 111–114.

³² Ibid., 108.

³³ Ibid., 275 endnote 30.

³⁴ Ibid., 102–6.

the 2008 Bond film *Quantum of Solace*, is thus an all-too-real personification of the machinations of capital in the real world. And while the bourgeois media portrayed recent violent conflicts in the Central African Republic as fostered solely by ethnic and religious rivalries, with the good old French former colonialists and present-day imperialists stepping in to save the day, beneath the surface is the extraction of cobalt and other minerals crucial for electronic gadgets such as cell phones.

Sassen sums up that since 2006 “this sharp growth in foreign ownership [of land] is significantly altering the character of local economies, notably land ownership, and diminishing the sovereign authority of the state over its territory.”³⁵ This includes numerous expulsions, large and small, of people from the land that had provided their subsistence and economic life. For our purposes, what is of strategic import is how these land acquisitions and expulsions draw masses of people in rural and peripheral settings into direct antagonistic conflict with the movement of capital. While such masses are generally not proletarians, they are increasingly at the center of the fundamental contradiction between private appropriation and socialized production, and thus constitute a social force ripe for revolutionary struggle. As will be explored further in part three, this has certainly been the case with the communist people’s war in India in recent years. Here there are broader implications for the strategy of protracted people’s war in the oppressed nations. On the one hand, confronting local oppressors in rural areas before moving on to confront the centers of national power provides communists with the opportunity to build up a revolutionary army and a mass base before the reactionary military can destroy either. On the other hand, this approach may no longer apprehend the possibilities for the rapid development of revolutionary struggle given that rural and peripheral populations living on now valuable land or resources are suddenly forced to confront capital, and the repressive state apparatus backing it up, directly in their geographical location.

Above I have attempted to provide a broad outline of key global trends in the motion and accumulation of capital in recent decades that affect the formation of the proletariat as an international class and the development of social antagonisms due to the movements of capital. Such a broad outline does not explain how these trends manifest themselves in particular countries. Given that my analysis has been focused on the economic base, it needs to be stated that proletarianization and class antagonisms will always also be shaped by particular histories and specific social formations in a given country or locality, especially the persistence and intensification of national oppression and patriarchy.

While the broad trends outlined above do not address every feature of class formation in the world today, many features not addressed can be understood in dialectical relationship to these broad trends. For example, the deindustrialization of the traditional manufacturing belt of many imperialist nations forms a unity of opposites with the development of export processing zones—the production in the former was moved to the latter. As will be addressed in part four, in the US this deindustrialization, combined with the centrality of the oppression of Black people to US society, created a permanent reserve army of labor concentrated among urban Black populations for which the bourgeoisie developed a new mechanism of social control: mass incarceration. The larger point here is that understanding the broad trends outlined above should be helpful in providing strategic focus for communists in mobilizing our social base for revolution, but doing so will require delving into particularities both practically and analytically. Of course there will be plenty of other dynamics important to communist strategy in a given location that have not been addressed in this broad outline.

A working assumption here is that communist revolution requires an organized, ideologically and practically trained social base on a large scale, and the primary task of communists is to find and develop such a social base in whatever link in the shackle of imperialism they find themselves. This differs from those who imagine the emergence of a sudden

35 Ibid., 114.

political crisis enabling a small vanguard to quickly leap to the head of a revolutionary movement and seize power. To whatever extent that occurred in 1917 Russia (and this is questionable), to delude oneself into thinking a particular historical moment will be the model for future revolutions is to perpetually wait for history to repeat itself. While revolutionary crises in different forms may be necessary for revolutions to succeed, (1) the ability of communists to seize on such crises will be contingent, to a significant degree, on their organized base among the proletariat, and (2) revolutionary crises are created not merely by objective conditions and missteps of the bourgeoisie but by the strength and struggle of the subjective factor. It will have to wait for another essay to fully flesh out this conceptual difference.

TO WHAT END?

Following from the conception of the proletariat given in part one, in identifying key sections of the international proletariat I have sought to move away from a discussion of immediate struggles and conflicts with local oppressors and exploiters to focus, instead, on how these proletarians are brought into conflict with the larger machinations of capital. From this perspective, finance capital plays a more important role than those capitalists immediately exploiting labor, and the social anarchy of capitalist production is far more integral to class formation than the act of exploitation. Furthermore, as shall be demonstrated in part three, the qualities that make some sections of the proletariat potentially more prone to communist class-consciousness and revolutionary struggle are dispossession and dislocation rather than exploitation in the labor process.

What qualities we seek out and what aspects of class formation and class antagonism we prioritize, however, have much to do with how we conceptualize the larger aims of communist revolution. In identifying key sections of the proletariat today, my point is to look at how these key sections are strategically positioned to (1) recognize their fundamental antagonism with capitalism-imperialism *as a whole*, (2) take hold of the socialized produc-

tive forces after the revolution and wield them through social planning to meet the needs of humanity, (3) sharpen the communist revolution's objective of doing away with *all* oppressive social relations, and (4) carry out political struggle that cannot find resolution within the structures of bourgeois rule and thus requires the use of revolutionary violence aimed at seizing state power. From this perspective, what emerges is not a monolithic proletariat matching an ideal type, but different sections which bring various strengths and weaknesses with them.

Radical opposition movements today at best speak of linking different struggles—for example, linking the labor movement with resistance by those dispossessed of their land and resources.³⁶ While there is an aspect of this involved in developing an international communist movement, more the point is to develop a class-conscious proletariat concerned not primarily with its own struggle against its immediate conditions of oppression and exploitation, and at best the links between that struggle and other struggles, but rather concerned with moving humanity as a whole away from commodity production and toward communist society, with the seizure of power in whatever geographical regions are possible as the first step. Developing that class-conscious proletariat requires communists to undertake social investigation among those proletarians and develop organization and struggle in relation to the palpable social antagonisms those proletarians face. However, the point of all this must be to move those proletarians to view and work towards communist revolution as the only resolution to not just their social antagonisms but to the more fundamental antagonism—between private appropriation and socialized production—on a global scale.

CONTENDING WITH CENTRIFUGAL FORCES

In part because the proletariat is not a monolithic class, communists will have to contend with the various centrifugal forces pulling away from proletarian class-consciousness

³⁶ For a radical social democratic exploration of the possibilities of linking different struggles in present conditions, see Harvey, *Enigma*, chapter 8.



Street vendors in El Alto, Bolivia.

among it. Such centrifugal forces include those embedded within the proletariat's conditions of economic life, the active ideological work of the bourgeoisie and other reactionary forces among the proletariat and the material forms it takes, the organization and ideologies of non-communist oppositional trends, and the host of social conflicts among the people which the bourgeoisie actively fosters. The slums surrounding the cities in the oppressed nations are one site where these centrifugal forces pose particular difficulties for communists.

Given the crowded geography of the slums, the limited opportunities for even the most degrading forms of employment therein, and the fact that much of this employment involves individual rather than collective activity, slum-dwellers are pitted against one another in a daily struggle for survival. Especially when economic activity is petty-bourgeois in quality yet proletarian in condition, such as with street vendors, organization and ideology that transcends the potentially petty-bourgeois

outlook this economic activity fosters is a necessity. A partial example of this contradiction was in the political mobilization of residents of El Alto, a slum perched on a plateau overlooking La Paz. Owing to its geographic location and ability to blockade the center of power in Bolivia, El Alto became a fortress of struggle against some factions of the bourgeoisie's attempts to overthrow the Morales government. El Alto's residents consisted disproportionately of former peasants and miners who had recently migrated when their previous economic modes proved no longer tenable. In El Alto, they often worked as street vendors and in other more individually-based occupations. What cohered them into a fighting force both for their own immediate concerns and as defenders of the Morales government (at least against US-backed coup attempts) was a network of unions and neighborhood organizations that actively mediated disputes among individuals, such as conflicts between competing street vendors, as well as various non-communist oppositional ideologies, including the legacy of anarcho-syndicalism and Trotskyism

among former miners.³⁷ Much can be learned from this experience of forging collectivity among basic masses engaged in individual economic activity even if it needs to be recast and strengthened with the ideology and larger objectives of communism at the core.

Besides the petty-bourgeois quality of a significant degree of economic life among slum-residents, the international bourgeoisie has worked to actively foster both this petty-bourgeois quality and its ideological counterpart. This has taken shape largely through the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) presenting themselves as the saviors of the slums and through the World Bank and other imperialist entities' use of micro-loans. Under bourgeois logic, the solution to the impoverishment of the slums is to enable slum-dwellers to succeed in the free market by setting up micro-enterprises and giving them titles to their land. The results have invariably been social differentiation wherein a handful advance their individual positions through their entrepreneurial activity while the masses fall into even more dire straits, and land ownership results in accumulation for some and dispossession for the masses. Besides failing to eradicate impoverishment, the promotion of individual entrepreneurship and ownership heightens antagonisms and destroys social solidarities and collective organization among slum-dwellers, engrains petty-bourgeois ideology into their very survival strategies, and gives an ideological bulwark to the free market more broadly.³⁸ Communists organizing in the slums would thus need to ideologically and practically combat the bourgeoisie's imposition of micro-enterprise and put forward a radical alternative both in the immediate sense and as a larger objective.

Other centrifugal forces pulling away from proletarian class-consciousness in the slums are reactionary ideologies and the organization and material practices these reactionary ideologies guide. The ideologies of crime/gangsterism and religious fundamentalism stand out as holding sway among large sec-

tions of the worldwide slum population. Both have their roots in the material conditions of the slums.

Criminal activity (that is, economic activity deemed illegal by the bourgeois state), from petty theft to drug gangs to prostitution, is ubiquitous in the slums just like it is among any surplus population without means of survival. Moreover, crime is by no means a peripheral activity in the world economy, as "the three largest sectors of global foreign trade are in drugs, illegal guns and human trafficking."³⁹ Given the prominence of and social stratification within the illegal economy, it would be detrimental for communists to write off those forced into criminal activity as a lumpen-proletariat incapable of or antagonistic to revolutionary struggle. The women and girls trafficked as sex slaves around the globe and the armies of prostitutes in the oppressed nations often serving that grotesque creation of imperialism called sex tourism are clearly an exploited and oppressed element within the criminal economy. As with the feminization of the proletariat discussed earlier, these women can radicalize the revolutionary struggle by making patriarchy and the most brutal expressions of patriarchy prime concerns. Furthermore, especially in regards to sex-trafficking, there is the possibility of developing armed struggle without necessarily immediately confronting the repressive state apparatus and relatively easily garnering popular support when the bourgeois state sides with sex-traffickers and against communists.

The many youth in low-level positions within criminal gangs wield little power or economic resources. The rebellious spirit among these futureless youth and the fact that many of them have training and experience in armed violence offer potential strengths to the revolutionary struggle. This potential can only be realized, however, if the ideology of gangsterism is actively combatted and repudiated among these youth. It will not do to tail the brutal sense of individualism and willingness to use and degrade the masses of people to materially advance that individualism. Instead, it is necessary to contrast this ideology with the selfless love for the masses so advocated by Mao, and especially through thoroughgo-

37 This summary draws from Sian Lazar, *El Alto, Rebel City: Self and Citizenship in Andean Bolivia* (Durham: Duke University Press).

38 For a thorough and excellent critique of "the illusions of self-help" from which this summary draws, see Davis, *Planet of Slums*, chapter 4.

39 Harvey, *Enigma*, 44.

ing opposition to the patriarchal relations and degradation of women central, ideologically and practically, to gangsterism.

In regards to the growth of religious fundamentalism among slum-dwellers in recent decades, it is worth recounting how Engels accounted for the perseverance of religion among the masses after the establishment of industrial capitalism. While Marx's statements about religion being the opiate of the masses and the heart of a heartless world are well-known, Engels explained that religion first dealt with natural forces that dominated people that people did not understand, and subsequently with *social forces* that dominate people that people do not understand.⁴⁰ The social anarchy of capitalist production is exactly that force dominating people that they do not understand or have the means, under the rule of capital, to bring under their control. In the slums, this is felt all the more acutely given that slum-dwellers have been dislocated—geographically, economically, socially, and culturally—from their previous modes of existence

40 Engels, *Anti-Dübring* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976), 410–12.

not by the pull of capital's labor needs but by their expendability to capital.

Mike Davis provides a particularly stark example in Kinshasa, where the social force of capital has given rise to the popularity of Pentecostalism as well as widespread belief in witchcraft. Kinshasa was economically devastated by successive SAP dictates in the 1980s and 1990s and then left abandoned by capital, with informal activity and subsistence agriculture now virtually the only functioning economic life. As people sought explanations and spiritual solace from the misery around them, Pentecostal preachers provided answers. With the complicity of the preachers at the pulpit, the supposed sinister supernatural powers of thousands of children, purported to be witches, were widely blamed for the desperate poverty and chaos of Kinshasa. As a consequence, those children deemed witches were subjected to exorcisms, orphaned, and even killed.⁴¹ What seems nonsensical makes sense in slums devastated by even more nonsensical forces than witchcraft: the social anarchy of capitalist production and the dictates of debt

41 Davis, *Planet of Slums*, 191–98.



and IMF-imposed structural adjustment. Here proletarian class-conscious provides the only explanation for the social forces that dominate people, and thus must offer itself as a far more compelling line of reasoning than that of Pentecostal preachers and witchcraft. As with the ideology of gangsterism, the patriarchy implicit in religious fundamentalism constitutes its most glaringly oppressive feature in the domain of social relations, and thoroughgoing opposition to that patriarchy is thus a necessity and a strength in building a communist pole in the slums.

In contending with these centrifugal forces, while struggles, organization, and material practices that address the conditions of life in the slums and present palpable alternative paths to bourgeois entrepreneurship, gangsterism, and religious fundamentalism need to be

forged, the most important adhesive is communist ideology and the material practices it guides. Any immediate struggles and organization will always be temporary and outgunned (figuratively and literally) by the bourgeoisie, and will not be able to resolve the social antagonisms involved. Without an understanding of the material causes of their conditions of life and how these material causes can and *must* be eradicated through revolution and the socialist transition to communism, slum-dwellers will ever be left choosing from ideologies and modes of life bound to chain them to the prison of the present. While the slums provide the most salient example of how centrifugal forces pull away from the revolutionary potential of a section of the proletariat, the broader lessons here can be extended to the proletariat in all its manifestations.

Communist Leadership, Mass Work, and Building Power

by Comrades Jameel, Val, Arulgurunathan, and Anna

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INTRODUCTION

We should not shy away from the truth that communist individuals and communist organizations in North America (whether revisionist, Trotskyist, Maoist, anarchist, etc.) remain irrelevant to the proletariat and to political developments in general. There are many reasons for this irrelevance, but we think that one major reason is an incorrect conception of leadership, which stems from an incorrect conception of power and politics.

The purpose of this article is to spell out what we think is a functional conception of power and politics, and to articulate their relationship with leadership. Building and achieving power, we believe, is deeply linked with building up many thousands of communist leaders.

But who are communist leaders? We argue that a communist leader is someone who not only knows what needs to be done, but also actually gets a lot of people to do it. To elaborate, communist leadership is the unity of the capacity to develop and interpret a revolutionary line in particular circumstances (the neighbourhood, the workplace, etc.), and the capacity to unite and move people to act and advance along that line. This capacity can only be produced, steered and tempered through the practice of mass-line politics, that is, in mass struggle – and not in a room of intellectuals or party specialists.

This sounds obvious, but as we are going to show below it is actually pretty alien to the way that communists generally move in North America and certainly in Canada, not least of all ourselves.

This article proceeds in six sections. Section one provides us with a functional definition of power and politics. Section two

elaborates on the definition of the communist leader noted above, and section three expands that into definition of a cadre. Section four examines the role of ideas and ideology in leadership, arguing that ideas are necessary but not sufficient for communist leadership. Section five addresses the question of inequalities based on identity and privilege within organizations and correct and incorrect methods of rectifying these inequalities. Section six briefly elaborates on the incorrect conceptions of leadership and their political consequences.

I. POWER AND POLITICS

Our conception of leadership has to begin with our conception of power. Huey P. Newton defines power as “first of all, the ability to define a phenomena, and secondly the ability to make these phenomena act in a desired manner.” Indeed, this definition of power is reminiscent of Karl Marx’s thesis, “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.” Of course, we have to first interpret the world – to come up with always provisional theses about it and about what needs to be done, theses that need to be tested – but what do we require to actually change the world?

Social change occurs when many different factors and forces converge, and then certain factors become decisive in pushing the situation in a given direction. World-historical changes have generally required the confluence of war, political crisis and stringent class struggle. In this mix of factors, it is quite evident that mass action, and particularly organized mass action, pushes major social changes. The question is whether or not anyone is guiding or leading that mass action.

Communists prepare in the hope that they

can be one of the factors, if not the decisive factor, pushing a revolutionary situation in the direction that enables the proletariat to form a new state.¹ This requires that the masses, or a sufficiently large part of the masses, must be organized by the leadership of the communists. What matters, then, is the capacity of communist leaders to move people to engage in mass struggle in a common direction.

Organization matters because it is the concrete realization of the unity of proletarians – unity past very real differences² and past the atomizing tendencies of capitalist hegemony – and of their capacity to take collective action against their class enemies. Unity means the understanding that, despite differences, proletarians have interests in common with each other; this is also referred to as class consciousness. Collective action flows from *class consciousness*, but not automatically: it is entirely possible, indeed, quite normal, for people to be conscious of common interests, without doing anything in common about them. By providing an institutional scaffolding for people to pool their time, risks and chances of success, organization can help move people to action.

Our conception of organization therefore must not be a static one, but a dynamic one, because it is a constant process of raising class consciousness and persuading people to take class action. In this process, political leadership is crucial.

Doing politics, if it means anything at all, is to be able to unite many different experiences, interpretations and identities, that is, *interests*, into one bloc with one goal on one program. When even a small group of thoughtful people sit in a room united by an ideology, they can still have many ways of interpreting and executing that ideology. That diversity of interpretations and ideas increases if and

1 But, as the history of successful revolutions shows, the proletariat forming a new state does not make the other factors and forces go away, factors and forces that require the sustained and ongoing struggle. For example, the former ruling classes do not disappear, the threat of imperialism remains, and the compulsions of everyday life, like marriage, educating children, going to work, etc. continue to characterize the social realities of the new society.

2 For example, the very real differences of economic stratification within the class, which are tied into differences of race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and so on.

when we involve dozens, hundreds, thousands and millions.

Political leaders are those people who are able to wade into the mess that is the diversity of people's experiences, ideas and interpretations, and unify them into common action. This takes the diffuse power of individuals and groups and organizes it into something greater, something that can realize a common objective against a common enemy. Communist leaders are those who move people in all their diversity to unite to take such common action along a communist program.

Fred Hampton, the Illinois Chairperson of the Black Panther Party, was an exemplary Communist leader, one who actively and very successfully united the proletarian elements of Chicago across differences of race, gender, space and other affiliations. This is also why he was assassinated by the American bourgeoisie.

II. COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP

Getting people to take common action requires politicizing the relationships that exist among real, actually existing people. Power is located in the quantity and quality of relationships that proletarians have with each other. If communists are to make any inroads in building actual mass struggle, then communists must contend with the power and ideas that already exist among proletarians.

The "proletariat" or "the masses" do not present themselves to us as a homogenous amorphous blob waiting for the gospel of communism to be dropped upon them. We cannot underestimate the power that already or potentially exists among the proletariat, and assume that we can, by spewing some correct line at people, convince them of our position.

People tend to already have relationships with each other, in stronger or weaker ways. People are differentiated, and they often already exist in groups, groups that they participate in for well-being, for friendship, for community. They already look to particular people for guidance and leadership. It is when these groups acquire a political purpose, build with each other for political ends, that

they begin to take the shape of organization. Communists have to know how to intervene to take people from existing in groups to existing in organization.

Organization must be a very concrete measure of a real, objectively existing number of people, and their real, subjective level of commitment to each other, as expressed in real, objectively existing actions that they take.

Indeed, the most advanced revolutionary movements tend to know precisely who they are leading, quantitatively and qualitatively. They have concrete quantitative and qualitative benchmarks and goals for recruitment and development. For example, the Communist Party of Philippines, when beginning its organizing in a new place, first identifies the number of people living there, how people are divided up into classes and other social contradictions, who the “natural leaders” are among groups of people, and how they can assure that they build up, over time, to having the majority, if not all, of the people in that spot organized by one formation or another.

Social investigation, therefore, is about knowing, precisely, who the people are that we are organizing in any given conjuncture.³ What is the number of people in this neighbourhood or factory? Who are they? What are their class backgrounds and trajectories? What are their existing relationships with each other? Who are their naturally existing influencers, that is, leaders? What are the pressing issues that will bring people together? Social investigation has to be about people, because power is about people.

Once, or rather, *as* we discover these facts, we strive to adopt various tactics to bring people into organization. Communists must win over, persuade, or, at the very least, neutralize (if they are obstacles), the already-existing leaders among proletarians.⁴ They have to be

3 Social investigation is not merely about coming up with an elaborated and “correct” analysis of some phenomenon by tacking empirical details into a theoretical framework. That can be done by undergraduates for term papers, while graduate students can come up with new theoretical frameworks. Communist revolutionaries are supposed to do all that, *and* to move people.

4 If we do not intervene here and in this way, then we leave the most important terrain of class struggle to the class enemy. People exist in the groups in the ways they

able to guide these leaders in confronting and overcoming the challenges that come about in implementing a program of class unification and class confrontation. Communists must learn to move people who move people.

Let us, then, make a clear distinction between a communist as a person who has communist ideas and a *Communist* as a leader of people. Anyone can be a self-declared communist, all it takes is having read a few books and then to post screeds online, and these days you don’t even need to post screeds, a barrage of tweets will do. But a Communist is something else. As a friend has noted, there is a distinction between knowledge, which is the collection and selection of ideas, and wisdom, which is the application of ideas and the transmission of that application. Communists must not only know, they must also be wise. Knowledge can come from study of texts, but wisdom can only come from experience—from repeatedly trying to move people, and then moving people who move people. There is simply no other way to learn this wisdom, there is simply no other way to become a leader.

Accordingly, Communists must, necessarily, be forged and steeled in mass struggle. We should henceforth be wary of ascribing leadership to people who are not personable, that is, the kind of person who looks past and around actual, real people. Communists must be personable, meaning that they must have a love for actual people, a demonstrated curiosity about people. Communists have to think about people like a capitalist thinks about profits. There is no formula for being personable, some of our best leaders can be cheery and full of energy, while others may be grim and

do because of the class situation they are in, which is a situation produced by the various social relations they encounter (for example, income, rent, transit fares, family ties, etc. combine to determine where people end up living and who they end up interacting with or not at all), and these social relations are themselves a product of a capitalist society under bourgeois hegemony. Through landlords, NGOs and other agencies capitalists seek to intervene in these life-spaces of the proletariat. Existing leaders can get scooped up in these agencies and processes, and get churned into opportunists or burnt out shells who lose real and organic connections with the people around them. Or, alternatively, energetic people with no real base become propelled by agencies and processes into being “leaders” who are propped up because they are funded from above, without real purchase with the people from below.

sarcastic. What unites them is their concern for people as actual persons, not as abstract, homogenous masses.

III. COMMUNIST CADRE

If a Communist is someone who leads the persons (mass leaders) who lead people, then what is a cadre? A cadre is someone who can be deployed in new situations to lead the building of mass work and communist organization. Cadres are important because of their role in expanding communist organization, they are necessary if we are to get from dozens to hundreds to thousands. Cadres have to be able to train those under them at a higher ideological, political and organizational level than that required to lead mass leaders at the mass level. Accordingly, a cadre is a leader of Communists, that is, someone who can train and develop mass leaders into becoming Communists. Cadres are how we build outward.

In other words, at every level of organization you are expected to be a leader. Cadres lead Communists, and so they lead both within and outside of the communist organization. Rank-and-file Communists lead largely outside of the communist organization, meaning they lead mass leaders. Mass leaders lead their groups. At every level there is an expectation that people will train and develop the leadership of those they are leading. The point, then, is that the practice of cadres leading Communists within the communist organization is not *qualitatively* distinct from the practice of Communists leading the mass leaders in the mass work.

Differences of opinion and interpretation do and will necessarily exist in communist organizations as well, as Communists represent different social bases outside of the communist organization and the class struggle manifests itself inside the communist organization. The differences among members often resolve themselves into two opposing lines, i.e., the two-line struggle.⁵ It is precisely in this context that just as Communists seek to reconcile and advance the different interests

⁵ There is a forthcoming document from Comrade Arulrunathan on the question of two-line struggle, and how we have experienced in our organization's development. We hope it will be published in Uprising Volume #9.

and blocs among the masses, while blocking or countering reactionary ideas, so too must cadre reconcile and advance the different interests and blocs that exist among Communists, and, stop and repudiate some of them. The ideas and interests oriented toward continuation of revolutionary proletarian struggle must be advanced, while those that obfuscate and obscure must be blocked.

Cadres must guide Communists in confronting and overcoming the challenges that come about in organizing mass leaders. It follows, then, that cadre themselves are people who have been forged and developed in the mass struggle, and who are able to advance qualitatively and quantitatively to develop and lead Communists.

IV. IDEAS, SKILLS AND COMMITMENT IN LEADERSHIP

In pointing out the importance of people who unify and move people in the field of actual mass struggle, we do not intend to ignore the role of ideas or other skills in leadership.

In the past, we have assumed that people with ideological clarity are obviously leaders, but have found that once given leadership some such people are incapable of actually bringing people together, developing them, and advancing them to common unity. Rather than advancing the organization, this set us back. We continued to think that once someone expressed communist ideas, or something resembling them, then we ought to recruit them into the organization, without asking about their actual demonstration of leadership in terms of building other people.

Having sophisticated analyses of the world, or even simple ones, can be useful, but the "correct analysis" does not automatically lead to power or victory. Plenty of organizations with garbage analysis are quite powerful, and plenty of organizations with interesting analysis are actually just collections of talking heads. Articulating a compelling analysis of empirical facts does not make one a leader, not in the absence of actually leading people. When we have intellectuals telling us about how to understand the world, without showing us that they can also organize actual pro-

letarians, we should be suspect of that being leadership. For, as Huey points out, to “define phenomena without acting ... is to become an armchair philosopher.” Armchair philosophers can be useful as resource persons, but they are not to be confused with *leaders*.⁶

Of course, cadre require proper communist ideas, and a deeper understanding of these ideas. Robust ideological education is necessary, and accordingly having intellectuals on board in educating and developing theory is crucial in the building of communist organization. Our practice shows us that Lenin was very correct in arguing that specifically communist ideas simply do not develop spontaneously from mass struggles for better conditions. The development of communist ideology and analysis in a person requires study and specifically intellectual guidance, this is absolutely necessary.

However, ideas themselves also emerge from and get refined through mass work. The practice of persuading people, bringing them together, and pushing them to act collectively is a profoundly ideological process. Engagement with the actual ideas of proletarians and people more broadly gives a Communist a profound, visceral understanding of the communist theory and history that they are studying, and the capacity to question the limits of communist theory and historical practice.

It is precisely this dialectic between theory and practice with real people that defines the process of the mass-line (“from the masses, to the masses”) – collecting ideas from the people, reflecting them through theoretical study, and taking them back to the people. The theory does not remain unchanged in this process, such that Communists have the “correct” theory and all what matters is the continuous refinement of the ideas of the masses. No, both change and develop, they have to, or the whole enterprise is pointless. Our practice has to be flexible and creative, and often this means

⁶ The “genius” approach to leadership ignores that Karl Marx was not a very good political leader, that Josef Stalin defeated Leon Trotsky because he was at the end of the day a better political leader, and that Antonio Gramsci turned his greater focus to intellectual pursuits mainly because he could not organize the proletariat out of his prison cell. Angela Davis has been an interesting intellectual but it was people like Elaine Brown who, whatever their flaws, actually led.

abandoning long-held ideas or modifying them beyond recognition. That principled flexibility can only come from combining training in theory with a curiosity toward challenges, a curiosity best forged in practice.

This is why we define communist leadership as the unity of the capacity to develop and interpret a revolutionary line in particular circumstances (the neighbourhood, the workplace, etc.), and the capacity to unite and move people to act and advance along that line.

Communists as leaders also need skills – how to take notes, how to facilitate meetings, how to read and write, and so on. Yet, collecting these skills does not, in and of themselves, make one a leader. Such people can make for administrators, but there is a difference between organizing things and organizing people.

It is precisely in the course of mass work and organization-building that Communist leaders and cadre must refine and develop their skills at facilitating meetings or public speaking. That is because a Communist will have to contend with the oratory or cynicism of participants, with their incapacity to stick to time limits and to meander. People will not take a facilitator seriously unless that person has power, meaning exercises actual leadership over them. That is, the Communist learns skills in the context of contending with the power that already exists among proletarians.

Similarly, it is important to guard against the feeling that a person who is committed, who shows up to all the meetings, completes all their tasks and demonstrates consistency, is therefore ready to advance in leadership. Too often we confuse organizing things with organizing people. Comrades who are good at doing all the things but not good at moving people are not necessarily ready to move on in leadership. Placing such committed comrades in leadership positions that they are not prepared for results in unnecessary questioning of self-worth when they find that they do not have the organizing experience necessary to provide strategic and political direction. It can be a form of tokenism, about which we will discuss more in the following section.

Without any doubt, leading comrades and cadres must also be the most committed and consistent. But where leading comrades find their commitment tapering off, the desire to simply dismiss them must be avoided, and instead we must turn to criticism and self-criticism in order to mitigate their inconsistency and shore up their commitment.

We must guard against the belief that being intellectually versatile or having a very good collection of skills or being committed *determines* leadership. Indeed, one can be a well-read Marxist who is an expert at speakers' lists and holding people to time limits, but who cannot grasp the political importance of discussions taking place and make the requisite decisions about when and how to allow a meeting to proceed or to cut it short. There is no shortage of intelligent, thoughtful, charismatic speechifiers who, however, cannot organize their way out of a paper bag.

There is a difference between executing direction, and giving direction, between receiving strategy, and elaborating strategy. In a moment of confrontation, it is the comrades who give direction and who elaborate strategy who the people at large will turn to. This is because these comrades have been forged in bringing people to a certain point, navigating the difficulties of defeat and the challenges of victory, and interpreting the complexities of a situation and pushing others to move forward.

V. IDENTITY, PRIVILEGE AND LEADERSHIP

At this point it should be apparent that the goal of the leader is to constantly develop as a leader themselves, and to develop those they are leading into more advanced leaders. At the mass level, we seek those who are influential and respected, the natural leaders, and push them ideologically to politicize their natural leadership into political leadership. We push mass leaders to develop class consciousness, socialist consciousness, and ultimately communist consciousness. We push Communists to become cadre. At every level, we push people toward action to test their actual pull with people, and to sharpen and develop it.

In the past, our good intentions around ensuring that leadership positions be occupied

by women and people of colour has led to us taking unprincipled shortcuts. We have propelled people into leadership positions, without having pushed them through mass struggle and the methodical development of leadership. "If we want women's leadership, why don't we just give women leadership positions?"⁷

The assumption behind this position is that the experience of oppression automatically translates into having both the best analysis of that oppression and the best capacity for leading. Sometimes this is almost a moral stance, such that the proletarian women of colour must be in leadership positions by virtue of nothing else other than that they are proletarian women of colour.

This position of catapulting people into leadership positions generally leads to tokenism. The token women or people of colour then sit on executive bodies, but having neither an actual power base inside or outside the organization, and not having the requisite experience to deal with people who actually have power, and not having the requisite experience to handle the tasks placed at their table, they are actually powerless. Nor do they actually end up learning how to carry forth these tasks. No one simply learns as they go.

This tokenism naturally leads to frustration and questioning of self-worth, paradoxically combined with a lack of humility about actual shortcomings and areas for improvement and advancement. Tokenism is damaging. The point is not that those with less experience in organizing do not have something to teach those who have more experience, the question is how and under what circumstances that knowledge is transferred. Presuming false equivalency between two differently skilled and experienced people may lead to knowledge transfer in some cases, but more often than not it becomes an obstacle to those who ought to be leading to be able to push and develop those who ought to be led.

In order for people to actually be in leadership positions, they have to be ready and prepared for them. They have to demonstrate their

⁷ For a deeper elaboration of this experience of tokenizing women's leadership, read the section 'The Momentary Reign of Identity Politics,' in our summation document "Rectify and Reboot," p.15.

leadership among the masses and through their capacity to develop the mass struggle. In other words, we are talking about evidence-based leadership. This is leadership based on practice in the field, and not the practice of articulating the best ideas or the correct buzzwords around privilege and anti-oppression.

It is absolutely true that unequal access to education, to more disposable time and disposable income, to public interaction, to feelings of self-worth and authority – all of which are determined in complex ways by class position, race, gender, etc. – can sometimes facilitate unequal leadership development. But the whole point of communist organization is to smash these inequalities through struggle and through the practice of organizing, not by pretending that these inequalities do not exist or that they can be wished away through token appointments.

If we actually want to change the world, if we actually want the people to be self-organized and to lead the revolution, then that means it is precisely the most oppressed and exploited who are going to have to struggle against all the limitations that face them to become the sharpest of leaders. They have to be subjected to very high standards. There is no model of liberation where white petty bourgeois men go around executing tasks for their allies, that's just charity and liberal guilt.

If two-thirds of a neighbourhood's population is composed of women, yet the organizing effort is not reflective of that proportion, then that points to the severe shortcomings of the people leading that effort. Tokenizing women, not pushing them, not challenging them, these negatives won't help one bit. If we do evidence-based leadership correctly, then we will have to contend with and succeed in actually organizing women, who already tend to be the natural leaders of relatively well-formed networks, and developing their leadership even further.

Those people who actually do lead have the greatest responsibility to develop and push those they are leading to be ready to take on leadership positions. Sometimes, this means that it is, indeed, men who are leading women, those from petty bourgeois backgrounds leading those from proletarian backgrounds.

But it also means that if the current leadership is not fulfilling its obligation of developing and advancing the leadership of those they are directly responsible for, then they are failing at leading, and ought to be severely criticized and their behaviour rectified, or that they be appointed to a leadership position commensurate with their actual capacity to lead and develop those they are supposed to be leading.

VI. BAD LEADERSHIP AND BAD POLITICS

We should note that the incorrect conceptions of leadership emerge from the general isolation of communists in North America from the actual masses. With the defeat of most communist movements in the 1970s and 80s, Marxist ideas became the almost exclusive preserve of intellectuals operating out of campuses. While the original articulations of identity politics put forward a radical critique internal to socialist politics, their take-up during the decline of worldwide communist movements meant that they were absorbed into academia. Indeed, they were absorbed into supposedly radical ideologies like post-modernism, which took up the question of privilege and put forward a politics of anti-oppression, but abandoned class analysis and struggle.

It is no surprise that dominant ideas of leadership thus reflect that (1) ideas determine leadership, (2) experience of oppression determines leadership, or (3) being on the front lines of taking up work (or just being at the front lines in rallies) determines leadership. The problem with these approaches is that they shift the locus of power away from the people to all the wrong things. How they do this is important to understand for their political consequences.

To think that power comes from having the correct ideas is the mistake of idealism, contrary to the material bias of reality where power is located in the real activity of people, and whereby history is made not by individuals but by the masses and the masses alone. The idealistic approach seeks to put forward the "correct line," see who comes toward it, and then declare these individuals as the leaders of the proletariat. As Amilcar Cabral

pointed out, “the people are not fighting for ideas, for the things in anyone’s head.” To think that random people who have good ideas (more socialist, more anti-capitalist, more anti-imperialist) are the real material leaders is just wrong practice.

The tokenistic approach to identity politics locates power in the moral claims of victimhood. That is, it locates power in appealing to the good sense of the oppressors. Fundamentally, this means that tokenism does not seek to build an independent and autonomous source of power, but to become included in existing channels of power. Thus, contemporary identity politics seeks to “diversify” executives, whether they are in small activist groups or in large corporations or universities, but thereby conflates a strategy of individual upward mobility with a strategy for broader societal transformation – by diversifying executives, it goes, we will be better able to focus on the issues of women or people of colour. This tokenism ignores that power is ultimately located in the capacity to persuade and push other people. Even if we catapult individuals into executive positions, the real power will always be exercised by people who are able to garner and develop followers. There are no shortcuts to power, no shortcuts to leadership.

The approach that privileges the most committed and most militant as the leaders locates power in the organizing of things rather than in the organizing of people. Hence, those who complete tasks, organize and participate in rallies, seminars, and other such venues, are considered to be leaders. Commitment and militancy may indeed be necessary but they are not sufficient: it is possible to organize things and events without actually pushing others to become leaders. Here, then, we make the mistake of substitutionism, where the actions and understandings of a few individuals substitute for those of the many. Accordingly, such a view of leadership ignores that the power of the enemy is located fundamentally in its control over the people, not over things, meetings, events and media moments.

Insofar as these approaches circumvent the difficult struggle of the patient and long-term work needed to build real proletarian power, i.e., proletarian leaders, these approaches are

opportunistic. They ignore that the purpose of leadership is to build more and more leaders, in the thousands, not small cliques of self-aware true believers. They seek shortcuts to elevate individuals or small groups, if that, into apparent positions of leadership, rather than seeking to elevate the class. In this respect, they conform to predominant liberal individualism rather than challenging the dominant ideology and politics in any real and oppositional way.

We find that then that these mistaken approaches lead to bad, indeed, bourgeois politics. Idealism lends itself to privileging state-funded academics as leaders, even if they have no base in the proletariat, speaking mainly to other petty bourgeois intellectuals or to students. Tokenism lends itself to appealing to the state and existing institutions for more positions for “marginalized” groups. Substitutionism similarly lends itself to making appeals to the state, rather than organizing the proletariat. These three approaches actually go very well together, and make of the contemporary left in North America isolated, moral critics who are appellants to the liberal state, not contenders for power.

CONCLUSION

If we are to rectify the problem of communist irrelevance to the proletariat, we not only have to orient our activities toward where the majority of the proletariat is at, we also have to adopt the correct methods of leadership.

The process of building power has to be understood as one of scaling up. There is already actually existing power among proletarians, insofar as there are people who are understood as leaders, as influencers, as people who can define phenomena and make others take action in a desired action. This leader could be, for example, the matriarch of a group of families who persuades all of them to sign a petition.

Communist leaders seek to identify and aggregate this power. Political leadership is about uniting the many different interests and groups that already exist among proletarians into one bloc with one goal on one program. The greater the number of people organized through a common program, the greater the power of the proletariat. Communists thus have to find the already existing leaders among the proletariat, and unite them in a program of class unification and class confrontation.

Communists, thus, must have their leadership forged through seeking to persuade people, facing their enthusiasm and their skepticism, their activity and their inertia, their brightness and their ignorance. If a communist does not have a love and curiosity for people, they will not be leaders. Indeed, based on their very different contexts, Communists must be able to develop and interpret a revolutionary line, and be able to unite and move people to act and advance along that line.

Communist *cadre* are those who can be deployed in new situations to lead the building of mass work and communist organization. Cadre are crucial for expansion, and must be able to provide an even higher level of ideo-

logical, political and organization training than that required of Communists in leading mass leaders. That is, cadre are those who are best suited to develop and recruit people into being Communists, those who are best able to provide guidance and leadership to Communists. Just as Communists seek to reconcile and advance the different interests and blocs among the masses, while blocking or countering reactionary ideas, so too must cadre reconcile and advance the different interests and blocs that exist among Communists, and, stop and repudiate some of them.

There should be no confusion or misunderstanding about our approach. We are not talking about bypassing the most oppressed or exploited people in developing communist leadership, but quite the contrary. We are talking about identifying those who have influence as social leaders, and challenging them to take action and become political leaders. We are not talking about ignoring the role of communist ideas and ideological training, but rather about ensuring that communist ideas develop and evolve in the context of mass struggle. We are not talking about ignoring commitment and dedication to tasks, but about grounding such qualities in actual leadership of people. Developing these leadership skills is not an easy process, but is an intrinsic part of class struggle – that part that forces us to reshape our own ideas and behaviours even as we begin to engage the class enemy – and there are simply no shortcuts.

It is not particularly difficult to spew communist ideas in the general direction of proletarians on the street corner (although, to be fair, few communists or radicals actually do this), it is quite another thing to struggle alongside and with those proletarians to find their leaders and to politicize them and develop them to mass leaders and ultimately to become Communists and cadre. Such politicization is the task of communists everywhere, and is what is most sorely lacking among communists in North America.

How R.I.'s mass work made me a better communist

by Comrade Anna

February 2016

This document by Comrade Anna was written close to the beginning of our process of rectification, but sometime before we within RI really understood that we were actually in a rectification process. There is a certain timelessness in Comrade Anna's intervention concerning the significance of mass work for the morale and outlook of revolutionary communists that we stand behind. And her intervention contrasts sharply with the mood of collapsing morale in the organization when we were in the period of bourgeois deviation that is accounted for in our ten year summation "Rectify and Reboot." And so, Comrade Anna's piece constitutes an important intervention that captures well the subjective mindset of RI members both prior to and within our process of rectification. That said, this document should not be taken as a final word on the question of mass work in general or our mass work in particular. Both the thinking of the author herself and our organization as a whole have matured on this particular question. And so, further interventions are forthcoming.

-Uprising Editor

If divorced from the masses, being a communist in an imperialist centre can really make you feel crazy – like you can't relate to anyone except your close comrades, which in turn makes you feel like a conspirator. I used to draw my inspiration of communist revolution from history (China, Russia) and from my sisters and brothers in strong communist formations in the third world (Philippines, India). But ideas could only take me so far. These days, however, my inspiration comes directly from my mass work. My mass work has made me feel fully-rooted in the broader material reality of the proletariat and it's shown me that revolution is not only necessary, the super-exploited and nationally oppressed yearn for it. Mass work has made me realize that those whom I am organizing – who don't know anything about MLM (the science of making revolution) – are ready, thirsty and committed to struggling for a new way of life, for political and economic justice. Even though my class background is proletarian, it's my direct organizing with other class-combative proletarians that confirms I'm not crazy. In this piece, I want to talk about what I think makes mass work communistic and revolutionary when guided by the mass line practice, and why it is important for a communist party to engage in mass work.

A communist party cannot grow by simply waving a red flag to draw in the masses.

Although this may attract textbook revolutionaries who are well-intentioned, it cannot sustain in the long run. For over three years, I was in a mass organization led by R.I. members – a media organization where we reported and agitated on class conflict and movements within an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist framework. We also studied communist theory in this organization. It was the first mass organization I had ever been in my life. For the first two years, I was happy to be surrounded by like-minded communists, soaking up MLM theory on the history and theory of revolution.

But after two years, I didn't feel like I was doing anything revolutionary or communistic anymore. Instead, I was burning out from going to tons of meetings with the same group of activists in an organization that wasn't growing. Because we didn't actually directly engage in class struggle, I felt like we weren't putting communist theory into practice. As an organization, we were stagnating and burning out from busy activist work. I quickly became undisciplined and began to lose my stakes in continuing on. Liberalism took its toll. I knew that what I was doing wasn't revolutionary.

After some internal struggle and assessment both within this mass organization and within the R.I. Branch in our region, I was ecstatic when comrades came to the same

conclusion: as communists who wanted to make revolution, we needed to build effective mass organization rooted in the proletariat in order to identify and develop organic leadership from within the oppressed and exploited sections of the working class. We had been discussing concepts of dual power for a couple years at that point within the organization, with some of this theoretical content being published in *Uprising*. This reached a boiling point a couple years ago, and led to a major reorientation of work in our region. We were now ready to reorient our organizing and carry these ideas into practice.

In my region, R.I. spent over half a year discussing and planning how to proceed with building a mass organization rooted in a proletarian community. Lenin once called on socialists to go lower and deeper, to the real masses. So this is what we did.

* * *

It's been over a year since I've been a mass organizer. As a first-time mass organizer, I've found that building a mass organization and organizing people is really, really hard. We do have a long way to go. It takes a long time to talk to most of the people in a community or a building; and even longer to build trust with people and engage in a real conversation that compels them to get involved in collective class struggle. It is really hard – but it is also so reaffirming.

In a year's time, I feel like I've seen the science of revolution come to life. I've seen lots of doors close on me— "Sorry, not interested." But I've also seen many among the masses more ready to take on struggle than I am, and I've seen many take my work more seriously than I do. These experiences have given me so much hope and continuously reaffirm my commitment to advancing the struggle for communism in Canada.

One of my strongest contacts in the area I am working in is a woman named Tamara (not her real name). She's a young and strong single mother from an oppressed nation who has independently struggled against everything that is fucked-up in this bourgeois colonial society, and she's taken up our organization's call for class struggle against local class enemies.

Every interaction with Tamara inspires me, but there are two that's impacted me the most.

The first is when Tamara and I went out to talk to other strangers and people she knows in the community. The experience of organizing alongside with her and introducing other masses to organizing was really powerful for both of us. At the end of the night, we were riding on that same inspired wavelength. We had big smiles on our faces and we gave each other genuine big hugs. It was also the first time we shared our uncensored personal stories with each other: the betrayal we felt in a patriarchal class society, what made us angry and hurt, and why we want to fight. I could tell that the experience had made a deep impact on our commitment to build organization. It was so powerful and real, and the feeling of hope I had that night reaffirmed my belief that the masses can be organized for communist revolution in Canada.

This belief was reaffirmed a second time with Tamara two months later. The organizing committee of our organization took it's foot off the pedal a bit at the precise moment we were just ramping up our mass organizing. Consequently, we organized a poorly-attended meeting with our contacts. I felt discouraged and embarrassed – I felt like I couldn't face Tamara until our organization got back on track. A week without contact turned into two, three, a month. I wanted to contact her, but I was too embarrassed. When our organization finally got back on track with a clearer strategic plan, I felt confident enough to return to the building and knock on Tamara's door. Tamara was not happy to see me! She was very angry that I had dropped off for a month, understandably so. We talked and I told her honestly why I hadn't been in contact. Luckily, she understood. The anger that she expressed still affects me today. Not because I hate having someone mad at me, but because she felt like I had betrayed her. We came to her asking her to take up leadership in building a mass organization in her building and she took up that call because it resonated with her – it offered her a promise of a better future. Then I disappeared without a word because of my own ego. This experience showed me that the masses are serious – when offered organization as a tool to fight, they are ready and want

to commit to struggle. Like I said earlier, my inspiration these days comes from the masses I directly engage and organize with.

Some Maoists in this country critique mass work as being economic, not communist or revolutionary. There is no doubt that mass work can be un-communistic and not revolutionary. This happens when communists see themselves as do-gooders “helping” people and doing charity work; when communists refuse call on the masses to engage in struggle and refuse to go deep amongst the masses and struggle alongside them; when communists limit the tasks of the masses to an economic struggle for better immediate living and working conditions as opposed to a struggle for the overthrow of the rotten capitalist system; and when communists refuse to provide revolutionary leadership to the masses and refuse to develop leaders from among the masses. So what makes mass work communistic and revolutionary?

To me, revolutionary communist mass work is the combination of engaging in mass line practice and having a mass perspective. What does it mean to have a mass perspective and what is mass line? For a long time, these concepts were important to me but in a very abstract way.

Having a mass perspective means recognizing that it is the masses are the only force that are capable of waging revolution – it means that we have faith in the masses to create revolution, to take up revolutionary ideas through the practice of engaging in struggle. In practice, it means that we struggle alongside the masses, and through this, we expose the masses to revolutionary ideas and practice.

The mass line is the method of revolutionary leadership of the people. In practice, this means that we take up the problems of the masses as our own; that we dare to struggle alongside and with the masses; that we learn from the masses; that we take the most progressive ideas of the masses and synthesize them through a revolutionary lens, give the most advanced ideas back to the masses for the purposes of waging class struggle, and that we develop leaders from amongst the masses. The practice of these two concepts in conjunction with one another is what I see as the practice of revolutionary mass work. Without a mass line practice, we’re bound to lose hope in the masses, we’re bound to lose faith in communism, and we’ll just become some grumpy-ass cynics. But with a mass line practice, I believe that we’ll become better revolutionary communists. At least that’s what happened to me.