

Working Paper #1  
Mass Intermediate Socialist Organization

by Max E  
LSR  
Margot R

Introduction

Today we are faced with a state that is losing all respectability among the masses of people. Watergate is only the tip of an iceberg. Millions have gone beyond awareness of political corruption to the questioning of all the dominant institutions and ruling ideas of society. Attitudes toward big business, government, schools, the church, the military, law enforcement agencies, and the traditional norms of family and sexual life are undergoing rapid transformation. Further, these changing attitudes are not expressed solely in the realm of ideas. In all areas of life there is resistance to the many forms of exploitation and oppression found throughout this social system. Workers are striking in ever increasing numbers and with growing militancy. Workers are also rebelling individually through absenteeism, slowdown, and in some cases sabotage. Consumers have organized to boycott milk and meat on a national level and other products on local levels. The school system meets increasing resistance in its attempts to mold the opinions and actions of youth, and the military can find fewer and fewer reliable recruits. Many women and men are experimenting with new forms of conducting their personal lives, searching for ways to break out of the all-pervasive alienation of US society.

Consciousness and resistance within the US are high and rising. At the same time, the ruling monopoly capitalist class is faced with a host of problems on other fronts as well: the rise and success of national liberation movements throughout the world, the growing strength of the socialist countries, and increasing competition from other imperialist countries. Every time they move to resolve contradictions in one area, they compound their problems in another.

In such a period, the revolutionary socialist movement in the US is presented with great opportunities to grow and develop. Such opportunities can be realized, however, only if organizations exist to sum up the experiences of the masses in struggle, analyze that experience in the light of national and international conditions, and provide an organized form in which people can move from unsystematic consciousness and resistance to systematic understanding and action. The deepening awareness of this need has made the question of organization the burning issue for the revolutionary socialist movement at this time. In this paper we wish to present, in a very preliminary fashion, our perspective on questions of organization.

I. THE LIMITATIONS OF INDEPENDENT PROJECTS AND STUDY GROUPS

At the present time, the bulk of socialist activists do their political work in project groups dealing with one specific area of struggle. These groups

have sustained many people for a long period and have had a number of achievements. They have played an important role in spreading revolutionary and progressive ideas among the population. They have enabled many people to gain experience doing political work and functioning collectively. Working in these groups, many activists have begun the process of sinking roots into different sectors of the working class. But in the present period, the limitations of project groups are becoming increasingly apparant.

Project groups focus their work on only one aspect of the struggle rather than on the transformation of society as a whole. This limits their ability to grow and to constantly involve new people in their work. The people attracted to the left today are at a higher level than the rebels and protesters of the 1960's: millions feel strongly that the problems of US society cannot be solved by piecemeal changes in one or another institution; these problems are related to the "system" as a whole. Even if their initial contact with the left is with a single project group, these people want to be part of a movement with a broad vision and a strategy for transforming all of society. People reading a radical newspaper or attending a political forum do not necessarily want to be involved in putting out a newspaper or organizing forums. These projects are only single aspects of building a complete movement. Project groups in themselves are an insufficient mechanism to build this complete movement. The energy built up by contact between project activists and new people cannot be effectively directed, and leads often only to frustration and demoralization.

Project groups are often limited in their life-span. External conditions and the level of struggle needed to keep up with these conditions are constantly changing. Project groups, designed for struggle in a single area, cannot keep pace. Often the best people drop out one by one to get involved in some different project or organization, or the whole group disbands. When this happens, the valuable experiences of too many individuals and too many struggles are then lost, because they have not been integrated into organizations that take seriously the process of summing up experience and making it collective property. Too many people have had to repeat the mistakes of others because those experiences were not available to learn from.

Due to their limitations in involving new people and in lasting for long periods, project groups are limited in their ability to develop leadership for revolution. To develop our potential to struggle requires criticism and self-criticism, it requires learning how to operate collectively, having a way to allocate our human and material resources. It involves experienced people learning from the enthusiasm and flexibility of people new to the revolutionary movement, and new people learning from the experience of people who have long

been in the struggle. This requires a group that has room in it for many different people having a commitment to stay together for a long time. Project groups are too limited in scope and life-span to adequately meet this need.

People also have needs for emotional and survival support over the years. In the long process of socialist revolution people will have to resist fierce repression and stay for years in oppressive jobs and living conditions. During this period people will also be raising children, devoting much time and energy to this responsibility and joy. People also need to integrate their personal lives into their political work. Only in an organization that is going to be around for a long time will these needs be met. And only if organizations like this exist will new people, recognizing the seriousness of their decision, throw themselves heart and soul into the struggle.

Many of the same people involved in project groups are also engaged in one form or another of systematic study in a study group. These study groups have also had a number of positive achievements. In them many socialists have developed their abilities to analyze their own experiences and the experiences of revolutionaries of other times and places. But study groups are subject to the same limitations as project groups in their limited ability to involve new people, to last a long time, and to develop leadership. In addition, they lack the ability to link theory and practice, to test in the realm of practice the ideas and analyses developed by the group.

It seems to us that for those functioning in projects and study groups a qualitative change is needed if these limitations are going to be overcome. Such a change can only be the change to a broader form of organization. Our perspective is that the form of organization that meets these needs best and is most appropriate for this historical period is the mass intermediate socialist organization.

## II. THE MASS INTERMEDIATE SOCIALIST ORGANIZATION

### Socialism - Our Political Program

We recognize that the oppression, exploitation, and mass resistance found in the United States and around the world today are inseparable from the fundamental contradiction of US monopoly capitalism. This is the contradiction between private ownership of the means of production and the socialized relations of production, resulting in production for profit rather than for use. This fundamental contradiction can only be resolved when the means of production are collectively owned and controlled, and production is for human needs rather than for private profit. In other words, we must replace monopoly capitalism

with socialism. The group of people who have the material interest in seeing this change and who have both the power and the potential consciousness to accomplish this transformation is the working class. Therefore we recognize first, that we must build organizations which are socialist, and second, that we must build these organizations primarily among the working class. From this understanding comes the primary political task of the mass intermediate socialist organization: to build a mass movement of the working class to fight for socialism.

#### The Mass Character

Stemming from this task is the character of the organization as a mass organization. It is an organization that large numbers of working people can join because it has room in it for people with differing levels of commitment and experience, and, within limits, for people with differing political views. Within this kind of mass organization, working people can develop their potential as revolutionary fighters and leaders.

#### Essential and Deferred Questions - The Intermediate Form

To build a mass organization of people having differing political views requires that we be clear about the distinction between essential and deferred questions. The principles of unity of an organization are the essential questions upon which there is no basis for political differences within the organization. These essential questions are the basis for criticism and self-criticism, for strategic decision-making, and for deciding on priorities. Without unity on essentials, no serious practice is possible. Deferred questions are those secondary to the main task at a given period. However, at some point in the life of an organization, questions initially deferred may become primary. Because of this, deferred questions cannot be ignored. Based on its practice and its study, an organization constantly tries to answer those questions to which it does not yet have answers and tries to achieve a better understanding of revolutionary theory and a greater unity. Until such answers are developed, the organization agrees to defer some questions, and there is room within the organization for differences of opinion.

Such an organization, because it has not answered every important theoretical question, clearly is not a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party. Although it is not a vanguard party, it is not an alternative to or substitute for a vanguard party. The present debates on the left state that we must choose now between joining a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party or a mass democratic socialist party which is an alternative to the Leninist conception of a vanguard. The mass intermediate socialist organization is neither. It is a mass socialist organization in which the question of the party is deferred. It is because the

organization is not seen as the final or highest form of revolutionary organization that the term intermediate is used. Within the intermediate form, people may hold a variety of opinions on many questions, among which is the eventual need for or shape of a vanguard party of the working class. But these people are working together in developing through the mass socialist organization, a mass working class movement for socialism.

#### Many Sectors, Many Fronts

In building a mass socialist movement in the working class we recognize that the U S working class is divided and fragmented in many ways. It is not only divided along racial and sexual lines, it is divided into industrial workers, service workers, state employees, unwaged workers in the home, unemployed workers, workers on welfare, and so on. Building a working class movement means doing work in all these different sectors.

We also recognize that people from all sectors of the working class are influenced by factors that they meet outside the place of work. These attitude shaping factors are ultimately determined by the capitalist relations of production. But such relations extend far beyond the place of work, because the ruling monopoly capitalist class owns and controls not only the workplace but the entire setting of society. They control the institutions of cultural and ideological expression - the schools, the media, and so on. Thus if we are going to organize successfully against existing economic relations, we must go to the people at the many places they meet the ruling class and its ideology. A grip of many fingers must be smashed and it must be smashed finger by finger - on the job, in the school, in the store, in the family, in the voting booth, in the media, in our personal lives, and certainly in the head as well. Thus our approach to organizing is not only to work in many sectors of the population, but also to struggle on many fronts, to struggle in every area of life in which we encounter the enemy.

In carrying out work in many sectors and on many fronts, a mass intermediate socialist organization would work at times through mass non-socialist organizations. These mass organizations, while not socialist, would be areas of struggle against one or another aspect of monopoly capitalism, racism, and sexism. Examples of such organizations might be a workplace caucus, a neighborhood committee, a high school student union, a consumer action group, or a legal defense organization. A mass intermediate socialist organization would certainly work in united fronts with other working class organizations. Still further, such an organization sees that it is possible for the working class to acquire allies from other sections of the population, and would be open to working under certain conditions with organizations representing sections of the petit-bourgeoisie or lumpenproletariat for example.

### Non-Sectarianism

In all areas of work a mass intermediate socialist organization must struggle to be non-sectarian. This means that it would work with other organizations on a principled basis when the respective projects or actions will lend strength to the movement as a whole even when it has political differences with some of these other organizations. Further, being non-sectarian means that such an organization does not try to recruit members from other revolutionary organizations or spend its time publicly attacking other organizations. This does not mean the organization will not defend itself if attacked.

A mass intermediate socialist organization is built on the strength of its own practice and programs, believing that it is on the terrain of social practice that correct ideas will be sorted out from incorrect ones.

### The Development of Revolutionaries

Within a mass intermediate socialist organization the highest value is placed on developing people's potential to struggle. We will never overthrow monopoly capitalism through superior technology, conspiratorial schemes, or surrender by the enemy; our strength lies in people. People are our most precious resource and we absolutely must self-consciously develop this resource to its highest level. In order to accomplish this, certain things must be recognized. First, the primary element in the development of revolutionaries is social practice. Second, the development of theory is important, and therefore the responsibility to study is just as much of a political responsibility as other forms of political struggle. Third, class struggle goes on within organizations as well as outside of them, in the struggle for leadership, for ideology, for the class composition of an organization and the class outlook of its members. Criticism and self-criticism is an essential part of this class struggle, essential for transforming ourselves, eliminating our weak points and bringing out our strong ones. Another part of this class struggle within an organization is the struggle against racism and the struggle against sexism. These class contradictions will exist within all forms of organization as long as classes exist in society. These struggles are in fact the dynamic force which allows organizations to develop as external conditions change, and an organization must never try to blur over or cover up contradictions in a search for unprincipled harmony.

### Many Mass Intermediate Socialist Organizations

The perspective for mass intermediate socialist organization is not a formula for one particular organization. There may in fact be many intermediate organizations in a given area. Certainly we hope to see a multinational

organization of both women and men. The racial and national oppression of third world people in this country is the basis for mass intermediate socialist organizations that are national in form (all-Black, all Chinese-American, etc.). Also, the nature of women's oppression is the basis for mass intermediate socialist organizations whose members are all women. Our goal is for principled and working unity between all these groups. We do not feel that there is a contradiction between this goal and the existence of autonomous national or feminist socialist organizations alongside multinational organizations of women and men. It is a strength of the intermediate socialist perspective that it has room in it for these different kinds of organization.

Further, we recognize that socialism will not come to one city or one state at a time. We are talking about a nationwide movement and eventually, therefore, about nationwide organization. But, given the movement's slender roots in the working class, moving too quickly to create nationwide organization leads to many errors. Our task is to build strong local organizations that keep in mind the long-range, nationwide perspective.

### III. OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

How does the mass intermediate socialist organization perspective differ from the other organizational proposals put forward on the left? Specifically, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the various proposals from our point of view? At least three other perspectives on organization have been suggested both locally and nationally and we want to look at each in turn: the Kinoy proposal for a mass party of the people, the New American Movement (NAM) perspective for a new mass democratic socialist organization/party, and the perspective of the Guardian newspaper and various pre-party Marxist-Leninist groupings for the earliest possible formation of a new, anti-revisionist communist party.

We recognize that our own views on these other forms reflect not only our ideas on mass intermediate socialist organization but also our present ideas on the nature of an eventual vanguard party and so on. We expect that many people might share our perspective of mass intermediate socialist organization and yet have different criticisms of these other tendencies.

#### The Mass Party of the People Tendency

The Kinoy proposal sees accurately that unity, and a sense of organizational permanence stemming from unity, would be of great value to the revolutionary movement. However, the Kinoy proposal does not address itself to the real reasons why such unity does not now exist. It does not offer the clear political and strategic direction that is required to build a lasting, principled unity

between people. Instead, the Kinoy proposal searches for a "lowest common denominator" solution and merely tries to formally unite existing tendencies within one organization, a mass party. Recently Kinoy has begun to use the word socialism to describe such a mass party's program. But even here the debate concerning the word is more over the form rather than the content of a socialist program. Such a mass party is essentially a call for unity based on the need and desire for unity alone. It seems unlikely to us that an organization based upon such formal rather than political unity can provide the kind of support and help people need from organization if we are going to function in a politically effective way.

#### NAM and the New Socialist Party Tendency

The NAM position in favor of a mass democratic socialist organization or party offers more in the way of direction than the Kinoy proposal. Its strengths and weaknesses are most apparent when the proposal in its various forms is examined alongside the practice of NAM .

NAM is explicitly socialist , not merely anti-capitalist. It correctly sees the need to unify around essential questions, and does defer others. It succeeds in avoiding a narrow and economist approach to politics , and does raise issues which call into question power relationships in society as a whole. But this kind of work, while necessary, is ultimately fruitless unless the organization doing it also sinks deep roots into at first some, and eventually all, sectors of the working class. For it is not socialist ideas that make revolutions; it is a class of people armed with scientific socialist ideology that make them. So unless the broad vision is given life by painstaking work in the institutions that dominate working class life, it will yield no material results. To perform this task requires an organization that is disciplined, that can make and carry out decisions, and that can deploy its human and material resources in a systematic way. Thus it requires an organization that is willing, not to impose discipline and leadership on people, but to introduce discipline and leadership as the conditions of class struggle develop.

It is precisely this kind of organization which NAM has failed to develop. NAM has remained from its beginnings an organization dominated by and largely composed of people from only the most formally educated sectors of the working class. Partially stemming from this , and in turn reinforcing it, has been the raising of an abstract and formal conception of democracy to the highest principle of the organization. "Democracy" becomes primary, class struggle secondary. Since at any given time there will be some less developed members of NAM, or any future socialist party, moves that require more commitment, leadership, and discipline



can be, and are, opposed as "undemocratic." Instead of the organization carefully dealing with differences in its ranks and self-consciously raising everyone to the level of the most advanced people, the organization as a whole always remains at the level of the newest and least experienced members. In this kind of organization the decision making power remains in the hands of those with the most organizational experience and the most technical skills, in the hands of those with the most time to put into organizational affairs. These are usually the same people, again those with the most formal education and free time. The organization is not democratic at all; under the banner of democracy power relationships in the organization have merely reproduced power relationships in society as a whole. This has happened because the advocates of mass democratic socialist organization, much of the leadership of NAM for example, have lost sight of the fact that class struggle goes on within the organization as well as outside of it. Discipline, systematic study, and the requirement to be engaged in practical work are positive weapons of this class struggle within organizations, and raising a formal conception of democracy to the highest principle blunts these weapons.

Related to this way of handling democracy within NAM is the tendency to stress the side of class struggle that takes place solely in the realm of ideas. Thus, we find in NAM and the other advocates of a new socialist party, the stress on "putting socialism on the agenda", being "explicitly socialist" in every situation, using the words "democratic socialist" over and over. It is the socialist content of an organizations' programs rather than the formal use of the word socialism that is important. Whether or not the word is used in a given situation is a tactical consideration, it should not be seen as a strategy in itself. Related to this overemphasis on the power of words is the overemphasis in this tendency on the electoral and agitational side of class struggle, often to the neglect of long term day-to-day work in institutions of power. These shortcomings have made it difficult even for people who agree with NAM's written politics on class, racism, sexism, and imperialism to see in that organization the way to implement those politics.

Our feeling is that these shortcomings are not necessarily found in all mass socialist organizations or all NAM chapters, as NAM itself is a very uneven and heterogeneous organization. These shortcomings are characteristic, however, of mass socialist organizations that, in the formal name of democracy, simply do not struggle, as an organization, over the important deferred questions. Thus, while individual members and some chapters of NAM may struggle over the question of the development of a self-conscious vanguard

party, the practice of NAM takes a position which is objectively opposed to such a party. In that kind of mass socialist organization, attacks on the so-called "lack of democracy" in Leninism obscure the fundamental issue of which class holds power. This limits the theoretical growth of the organization, slows or stops the transformation of its class composition, and stifles and demoralizes the organizations' best and most energetic people.

#### Pre-Parties and the New Communist Party Tendency

The perspective of the most rapid creation of a new communist party through building pre-party Marxist-Leninist groups has other strengths and weaknesses. To examine these strengths and weaknesses we must first have an understanding of what a genuine communist party is supposed to be. Theoretically, such a party would be the most advanced detachment of the working class. It would embody the collective experience and accumulated knowledge of the working class movement, having a deep understanding of its experience in struggle both nationally and internationally. It would be made up of those people who have proven themselves to be the most selfless fighters for socialism within the working class; those who not only believe in the socialist revolution but who have a deep grasp of how such a revolution is built. The women and men of such a party would understand their relationship to their class and the masses of people in a dialectical way, that is, they both teach and guide the mass movement and learn from it as well. Because of all these qualities, such a party would be able to lead the working class and the masses of people in the seizure of power and the transformation of society.

Today no group has the depth of experience in all sectors of the working class to have more than a partial understanding of the important questions facing the revolutionary movement. Some groups might have quantitatively more members and might have quantitatively more experience than other groups. Qualitatively, however, all revolutionary socialist organizations are at the same ideological level whether they call themselves a pre-party or not. Our view is that it is not a better political line that differentiates a party from other socialist organizations. The vanguard party is a qualitatively higher form of organization than exists today, and we feel that today the condition does not exist for the formation of such a party. That condition is a mass socialist movement within the working class. Only such a movement can provide the groundwork, the soil, on which a vanguard party might be built. Theory is developed, ideas are transformed, and leadership emerges in the process of building such a movement. Neither ideological struggle and study divorced from practice, nor economist organizing in the working class, will provide the groundwork for building a vanguard party. Only the struggle to build a class-

conscious, socialist movement in the working class can provide that groundwork. A vanguard party, being the advanced detachment of a class, can only grow in dialectical relationship to that class. If such a vanguard is created in the US, it will not have to announce itself - its leadership will be accepted by the working class because of its qualitatively higher level of theory and practice. This is a time in US history when the working class is only beginning to be self-conscious of itself as a class with an independent role to play in the life of society. It is only beginning to come to grips with the difficult questions of the relationships between class struggle, national struggle for self-determination, and women's struggle. Trying to build a vanguard party at this time can only lead to splits and sectarianism.

This is not to argue that such a vanguard will develop spontaneously out of a working class movement; nor is it to argue that all the answers about what a vanguard might look like, or, for many, its desirability, are there. How this process is to unfold involves a host of difficult questions, and the job of answering them must be taken very seriously. The form in which they should and can be answered is within an organization which is engaged in the practice of building a working class socialist movement in the United States.

We do not want to deny the strengths of the pre-party groups. They place class struggle in the center of their vision and have developed disciplined organizations which can make and carry out decisions. Many of them have made contributions to the development of theory and the spreading of socialist and progressive ideas among the population of the US. Many have made contributions to supporting the struggles of peoples outside the US against imperialism. But these strengths and contributions do not alone make a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party. The pre-parties contain, like the rest of the movement, people at many different levels of theoretical development and practical experience. They tend to have a very one-sided view of their relationship with the masses, including other leftists: they are always ready to teach and guide but seldom ready to hear criticism or to learn. None of them has that depth of experience in all areas of working class life to really be the embodiment of the collective experience of the working class. We could note many examples of this, but the most glaring is the mechanical and superficial positions that the pre-party groups have on the question of women's liberation. For these reasons the pre-party groups have been looked at by most socialists correctly as sects, rather than as groups which have earned the right to lead the movement through their theoretical understanding, the level of their cadre, and their ability to combine theory and practice.

From this perspective, we can see how the organizations trying to build a Marxist-Leninist vanguard at a time when there is no mass socialist movement in the working class fall into one of two general errors. These errors are most glaring in the nationwide pre-party groups - Revolutionary Union (RU), October League (OL), and Communist League (CL) - but apply in principle to all pre-party forms. On the one hand, some groups, recognizing the need for the involvement of masses of people in socialist organizations, try to be a mass organization of workers and a vanguard party at the same time, thus watering down and muddling their politics. On the other hand, some groups, recognizing that a vanguard party must have a tremendously high degree of theoretical understanding and unity, have retreated completely from the mass movement and tried to build a theoretically pure group in isolation from the rest of the world.

These errors lead to others. First, though they are not in fact vanguard organizations, the pre-parties conceive of themselves as such. This leads toward regarding everyone not in your particular group as not a true revolutionary, leading in turn to sectarian behavior - "I am the core" thinking. Further, given that no group has yet earned the title of vanguard through the strength and breadth of its practice, each group must maintain its self-definition as a vanguard in some other way. Two ways are open, and the pre-party groups use both. One is provided by answering certain theoretical questions prematurely and upholding these answers as absolute principles of revolutionary purity. Theory becomes here not a weapon to guide the mass struggle but instead a weapon to club down others who disagree. And, because it is not developed through practice, the theories themselves are necessarily partial and often wrong. The second way is by the use of the tightest centralism in the internal workings of the organization. The creative thinking and initiative of lower level cadre, which are supposed to flower in a democratic centralist organization, are stifled. If allowed to flourish, they might destroy the unity of the group.

This combination of factors, an exaggerated self-conception (seeing yourself as a vanguard when you are not), the premature answering of theoretical questions, and an overly centralized internal structure, lead to the errors in practice of the pre-party groups. All too often they resolve political debates by quotations from history and appeals to authority rather than by using theory to analyze concrete conditions. Leadership by these groups in mass organizations or united fronts is won through organizational force or technique rather than through winning political struggle on the merits of issues. Denouncing honest opponents replaces the patient work of winning them over. All these styles of work have, unfortunately, created widespread hostility not only to individual

pre-party groups, but often to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism which the pre-party groups claim to represent.

In our view, all that has been said with regard to pre-parties will apply, perhaps even more strongly, to the new parties which at least two of these groups intend to form in the very near future.

#### IV. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE MASS INTERMEDIATE SOCIALIST FORM

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the mass intermediate socialist perspective? It seems to us that the strengths are along the following lines. It sees correctly that the main task during this period is to build a mass working class movement for socialism in the US. It is oriented toward spreading socialist ideas in the working class and drawing workers into the revolutionary movement. It struggles not only at the workplace but on many fronts. It provides a high enough level of political unity so that strategy can be developed and carried out, yet it makes no claim to have answered all the questions of revolutionary theory which must at some time be answered. It knows these questions are important and, while deferring answers to these questions, it studies them seriously. It is an organization in which people with somewhat different ideas can work together. It emphasizes the notion of development: of individuals, of the organization, of theoretical understanding, and of the whole revolutionary movement. It provides a place where people can grow, get support from their comrades, learn and practice criticism and self-criticism, and do effective political work.

The main weakness of this perspective is linked up with its strengths. That is, because of its flexible and developing nature, the organization has many internal contradictions. It contains people with a variety of ideas; it contains people at different levels of understanding, experience, and commitment. For these reasons, the people in it must be constantly aware of the internal contradictions if these contradictions are going to be handled correctly. We realize that the principles of unity of such an organization, its structure, and its main areas of political work must be developed with the goal of maximizing its ability to deal with its internal contradictions as well as the contradictions in all of society.

#### V. WHAT FORM THIS ORGANIZATION COULD TAKE

Different mass intermediate socialist organizations will deal with their internal contradictions in different ways. The nature of a mass socialist organization will reflect the social character of the forces within it, so different organizations of this type may have different principles of unity, structures, and areas of work. A mass socialist organization of a national

character will be different from a multinational one; an all women's mass socialist organization will be different from one containing women and men. An organization in the Bay area could be different from one in an industrial center like Chicago or a college community like Ann Arbor. We could not hope to set out in this paper any general plan for the principles, structure, or initial priorities of all mass intermediate socialist organizations. We do want to suggest, however, our feelings of what general considerations these might entail in the Bay area.

### Principles of Unity

Principles of unity are the essential questions which an organization must have agreement on, the basis for its membership, strategy, and internal life. Generally, these principles might include:

The fundamental problems of society cannot be resolved short of the working class seizing state power and control over the means of production. At the same time, the working class must struggle in all areas of life, transforming the political, ideological, social, and cultural life of society as well as the economic base.

We live and struggle in an international arena. US monopoly capitalism is imperialism, a system of domination by the US ruling class not only over the inhabitants of the US proper but over people all over the world as well. We are part of a worldwide struggle against imperialism. The working class of the imperialist countries must firmly support the struggles of oppressed people throughout the world for national liberation from imperialism. Thus we support struggles for national democracy in the colonial, semi-colonial, and semi-feudal countries of the third world. Within a monopoly capitalist country such as the US, the only consistent anti-imperialist program is a socialist program for the uprooting of imperialism at its roots.

We recognize that within the borders of the United States there are third world people who suffer national as well as class and sexist oppression. Our support of the right of peoples to self-determination must extend to these internal third world struggles as well.

We recognize the central importance of class struggle to the socialist revolution. We want to develop a concrete analysis of class in the US, one that deals with the contradictions between the working class and other classes and the different sectors within the working class as well. Such an analysis would have to give attention to the role of workers in large scale socialized production, workers in the state sector and service sector, intellectual and technical workers, and unwaged workers in the home, among others. Although all these

sectors are important, we understand that some sectors are more important than others, both in terms of the power to transform society as well as in their political consciousness of the need to collectively own the means of production. It is the task of the mass intermediate socialist organization to analyze which sectors are more important than others at a given time.

Racism has been a pillar of ruling class power in this country since whites first set foot on North America. This country was built on land stolen from Native Americans. The foundations of the economy were built by Black, Chicano, and Asian labor. Racist ideology has been used to divide and weaken popular movements which have challenged ruling class power. While this disunity caused by racism has been used against oppressed and exploited whites, racism is really rooted in differences in material conditions in the living situation of third world people: super-exploitation and super-oppression on the job as well as semi-colonial control of third world communities. Racism and cultural imperialism have also been used to attempt to rob third world people of their national identity, language, and culture. A mass socialist organization will struggle against racism in the economic, political, cultural, and ideological spheres.

The oppression of women is integrally bound up with the institution of the family. Capitalism has organized the family to serve specific functions. In the family, the unwaged labor of the woman - cleaning house, making meals, providing emotional support - maintains the day to day survival needs of the waged worker or workers. The family is the setting of the reproduction of the work force itself. Women's labor is the key to these functions, though we remember that many women work as wage-laborers outside the home as well. Our struggle against sexism must deal with all aspects of the exploitation and oppression of women - as wage workers, as unwaged workers in the home, as objects of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Capitalism needs the family to function. It has built up an ideology around heterosexual love. Because of this ideology, gay people have been oppressed by the schools, the media, on the job - everywhere they come up against the heterosexual norm. We support gay liberation and the right of all people to control their bodies and sexual lives.

We are opposed to all forms of racism and sexism. Collective ownership and control of the means of production is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for third world people and women to attain complete liberation. We recognize that it will take third world leadership to eliminate racism and women's leadership to eliminate sexism. We support the autonomous organization of third world people and women. We recognize that the theory of class struggle should

never be used to minimize the importance of national and feminist struggles, but rather to enrich and deepen them, as these struggles in turn enrich and deepen the class struggle.

We recognize the importance of theory and of the unity between theory and practice. We take seriously the task of studying the experience of revolutionaries not only in this country, but worldwide. We want to develop a deep grasp of the meaning and significance of the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, the Cuban Revolution, the Vietnamese Revolution, and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

We reject the division of life in bourgeois society between a public life and a private life - we recognize that the capitalist relations of production invade every sphere of our lives, shaping and molding our behavior in every area.

We recognize that the masses of people are the real motive force of world history, and without their enthusiasm, support, and wholehearted participation, little can be accomplished.

We ultimately envision a society of equality between all people, of worldwide cooperation, and of the abolition of classes and hence of the exploitation of one human being by another.

It seems to us that these are the kinds of questions which are essential. Of the questions which are deferred, those which we feel must be addressed most seriously in the life of the organization would be the development of a more than provisional analysis of class in contemporary US society, the development of a higher level of understanding of the relationships between national oppression and class and between women's oppression and class, an analysis of what is meant by revisionism, and the question of Leninist theory and the vanguard party. This is not to say that the mass intermediate socialist organization will itself become a vanguard party; mass intermediate socialist organizations will exist before, throughout, and after the seizure of state power.

#### Membership

To be a member of a mass intermediate socialist organization we feel that an individual must agree with the statement of principles of the organization, support the organization as a whole and not just one part of it, do ongoing political work with some committee of the organization, and have a commitment to study regularly. Further, we understand that although the organization does not oppose the possible development of a vanguard party, it does not feel that any existing organization is that vanguard. Thus, leadership for the organization can and must come from within the organization. On this basis, it would be expected that no member of a mass intermediate socialist organization also have



membership in another disciplined socialist or communist organization.

### Leadership and Structure

The organization would hold periodic conferences of the whole body at which major policy decisions would be made. At the same time, the organization must recognize the importance of good political leadership. To be viable, an organization must have a leading body that has a certain amount of responsibility/authority to carry out policy. Such responsibility/authority would include at least the right to speak for the organization to other groups or through the media, to co-ordinate different areas of work, and to develop strategic proposals. There might also be other bodies, organs of the leading body, who had the responsibility/authority for conducting internal education, orienting new members, dealing with matters of security, and so on. The organization is a democratic organization. As the conditions of struggle develop, as the organization grows, it may see the need for more centralism; it may not. In our view the question of democratic centralism for this kind of organization is not one of abstract principle: it is one which must be answered in the context of the group's practice, numbers, and geographical dispersion.

We would envision such an organization as having a very rich internal life. People would strive to develop social and cultural bonds with each other as well as constantly trying to deepen political unity. Internal activities such as education, discussion bulletins, and cultural programs must be structured into the organization.

### Areas of Work

Members of a mass intermediate socialist organization would do ongoing political work in one or another area with other members of the organization. These areas must not be solely a matter of individual choice but must be agreed to by the organization as a whole. No organization in its initial stages could do work in all the areas which it might desire and the question of priorities would be an important one. These suggestions then, are to provide a framework for discussion, not a definitive program.

Our main focus of work must be the institutions which organize people within this society and dominate their lives. Until the socialist movement lives and breathes in institutions of power it remains peripheral to the real lives of working people and peripheral to the struggle for power in society.

One such institution is the workplace. In the Bay area, the opportunity exists to do workplace organizing among industrial workers, health workers, clerical workers, public employees, teachers, transportation workers, and more.

Another key institution is schools, elementary, high schools, and colleges.

Work can also be done among welfare recipients, prisoners, the unemployed, and in the military. Another area of work is with those people in motion around

consumer issues against the health system, rising prices at the supermarket, and public utility monopolies among others. Certainly struggles should be waged for quality child care at many kinds of institutions. Defending people against the repressive apparatus of the state - courts and police - is necessary, recognizing here that the heaviest blows consistently fall on third world people in third world communities.

There is a need as well for work not so directly tied to institutions of power. Consistent anti-imperialist propaganda and support work, providing general political education through forums, schools, films, and so on, developing people's cultural groups, fighting against rape and to defend the rights of children and elderly people - all are important.

A mass intermediate socialist organization would work to unite different sectors of the working class. One necessary vehicle for this is a newspaper. The newspaper would spread socialist ideas to large numbers of people. It would also acquaint people with each other's struggles and in doing this would build general support for those struggles. It would build understanding that the fight for a united working class requires a constant struggle against racism and sexism.

At some point, when the organization developed a mass base, it would enter the electoral arena. This probably would first arise in the form of referenda and initiatives. We understand that state power is rarely won through the electoral arena and can never be defended with a ballot box. Nonetheless, elections are an important form of struggle against the state. They are another way in which we can raise issues with people and learn about their lives. The electoral arena can be used to build community organizations. And office holders can use their offices to expose the workings of the state, as well as to help defend working class interests.

Certain characteristics of the Bay area call for special mention. First, San Francisco is a center of finance and commercial capital. Therefore, it is an area to develop practice and theory in organizing workers employed in these areas. Second, the large number of socialists engaged in serious theoretical research in the Bay area provides an opportunity to link these people with the practical day-to-day struggles of the working class. Third, the existence of a strong, independent, and class conscious women's movement provides an opportunity to make a very serious attempt to integrate ourselves practically and theoretically with socialist-feminism. Fourth, the Bay area is an area where many third world people and groups have a long history of militant and revolutionary struggle. It is an area where there is room for

great strides forward in developing principled unity among a number of different national groupings.

By suggesting these areas of work we are not trying to deny that much of this work is in fact already going on, carried out vigorously by many people as individuals or in project groups. Much of this work however remains to be consolidated and summed up so it can advance further. We feel that the existence of a mass intermediate socialist organization could qualitatively change the level of people's practice in these areas. Having a broad organization to bring people into, having the resources of an organization behind you, having a place to develop strategy, being part of an organization that struggles on many fronts instead of one - these things can make the difference between a project group that stagnates and one that grows and helps people develop. This is true in all areas, but it is especially true of groups and individuals trying to bring political struggle to the workplace. Workplace organizing can be very isolating and it requires a long and serious commitment. Here the pressures are very great, but the rewards are great as well. Organization is the only vehicle through which these rewards can be realized.

## VI. CONCLUSION

We feel that the key to the organizational perspective put forward in this paper is the conception of the revolutionary process as one that must pass through a series of stages. This is as true of the development of organizations as it is of societies or individuals. Our task is to use theory to analyze concrete conditions and create the kinds of organizations that meet the needs of those conditions. In this period the US working class is awakening to self-activity and class consciousness and working people need organizations of their class, socialist organizations, to join and develop in. Thus the need for mass socialist organizations. We do not make the error of the "New Socialist Party" advocates however, who see the reality of today's needs but deny that new conditions and new forms of struggle will give rise to new needs for organization as well. Although the mass intermediate socialist organization defers the question of a vanguard party, it studies higher forms of organization seriously. We cannot of course foresee the results of our process. We do know, however, that our actions during this stage will determine a great deal of how we are able to respond to new conditions in new stages. Thus we take seriously the task of studying Marx, Lenin, and Mao and other revolutionary theorists to better prepare ourselves for the problems we will be called upon to solve in the future. At the same time, we do not believe that we must have answers to all of these questions before we can create viable socialist organizations of the working class. It is in these organizations that

the unity between theory and practice will be developed. We start from sufficient unity to guide our practice, answer through practice and further study some of the questions we have, and achieve a deeper understanding and more unity. Then we practice and study again, constantly increasing our knowledge, constantly broadening and deepening the revolutionary movement.

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This paper is more of a perspective on organization than it is a proposal for a specific organization. As such it may be used by many different groups of people. At the same time, the authors of this paper, and many other people we know of as well, are interested in seeing a multinational mixed mass intermediate socialist organization develop in San Francisco and the Bay area in general. This paper might serve as a step in that direction; yet the concrete work of building such an organization - talking to people, developing specific ideas on principles of unity, structure, areas of work, and so on, could not possibly be done by three people. That task could only be performed by a larger group of people, representing broader sections of the movement but at the same time politically united and highly committed to seeing such an organization develop. Because many people from different groups are already discussing these ideas, we believe such a group of people, a standing committee for mass intermediate socialist organization, can be created in the near future. To that end, we urge discussion of this paper among many different groups of people, both within and between groups and collectives. We also hope people in general agreement with this perspective will contact us.

Max Elbaum, Les Radke, Margery Rosnick