

# A SINGLE SPARK

INTERNAL NEWSLETTER OF THE PRAIRIE FIRE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

NO. 1

MAY, 1976

## About the newsletter

The PFOC internal newsletter is our main tool in this period to heighten and systematize political struggle in the organization, to deepen our understanding of the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and our ongoing concrete application of the strategy of Revolutionary Anti-Imperialism in the US.

It is the internal link which brings out the country-wide character of our organization-- our unity and our contradictions. It is the most public and accessible internal forum for the printing of our individual and collective positions on the political issues confronting the communist movement in general, and PFOC in particular. As such, it is a qualitative step forward in our common goal-- to develop communist organization.

In this period since the Hard Times Conference of evaluating our errors-- errors of failing to see party building as the central task; abandoning revolutionary anti-imperialism; not building anti-imperialist unity on the principled basis of support for the right of self-determination of oppressed nations; liquidating the struggle against the oppression of women and gay people-- it is appropriate that the national campaign of rectification demands the necessity of an internal newsletter as a political forum.

Deep crisis has illuminated all the contradictions and errors in our political line and strategy. Our newsletter is the most valuable collective tool for the sharing of positions which seek to rectify all aspects of our development, the most decisive of which is the development of correct political line around which our organization will be built. Thus our newsletter is a contribution to the development of our political line.

The rectification campaign has shown us the tremendous strengths we draw from communist organization and self-criticism. Both collective and individual criticism/ self-criticism is not only essential to the rectification campaign but to our ongoing development. In this period the process is very important because it will help to uncover the roots of our errors.

Mass practice is the testing ground for our ideas, where our theory proves its correctness or incorrectness. Individuals, collectives and chapters should write up critical lessons learned from their work which help to guide our ideas and our future political work.

Articles which take positions on our participation in coalitions e.g. Hard Times and July 4th, will heighten political struggle and the clarity with which we decide to participate in a certain coalition as opposed to another.

Every member is encouraged to contribute articles; it is not only a bulletin for leadership. Our newsletter forces us to articulate our ideas in the clearest possible manner and to put them forward in a country-wide forum. Many of the burning political issues in the PFOC should be addressed; the relation of oppressor and oppressed nations, the relationship of national struggles to the class struggle, what it means that party-building is the central task, "multinationalism" vs. "internationalism," etc. Also, we can all benefit from reports from comrades who are able to visit other countries e.g. Cuba, Vietnam etc., or major events, e.g. attending the Puerto Rican Socialist Party's Congress.

Our future goal is the production of a monthly newsletter. This will help to make it more current and the struggle more consistent.

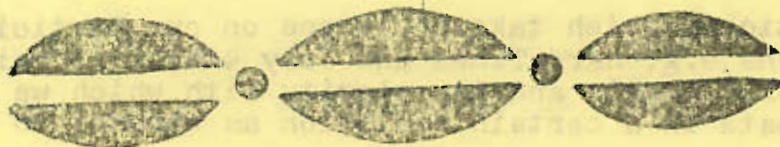
Part of the process of developing communist organization is to understand organizational integrity and how to wage political struggle with ourselves and other organizations in a principled manner. The contents of the newsletter are for the membership, and any decision to circulate it further should be made collectively.

#### IMPLEMENTATION

The production of this newsletter was beset by many difficulties. Deadlines were not respected, most copy came in not ready to be typed, etc. We are offering the following suggestions to facilitate the process next time around: The next deadline for articles is June 6. We would to receive camera-ready copy. Articles should be typed on legal-size paper, double-spaced, with one inch margins. They should be checked for spelling, and there should be no abbreviations. If these suggestions are implemented it will make the work on this end that much more efficient.

#### **In this issue**

The main thrust of this issue of the newsletter is rectification. It contains a political history of the two line struggle in the organization; "Sittin' On The Dock O' The Bay"; self-criticisms from National Committee members who take main responsibility for leading in the incorrect line; evaluations of the process of rectification in the chapters, Vermont and Chicago are not included because we never received them. There are three articles dealing with programmatic thrust and work that members of the organization are involved in; "Half The Sky", concerning the struggle against sexism in the organization, July 4th, and a leaflet written by the Boston chapter addressing the situation in that city.



## Sittin' On the Dock o' the Bay

This is a short sketch of the political development of the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee. It is not intended as a full analysis or as a substitute for the more fully developed expositions which must follow.

When the book Prairie Fire emerged, on July 26, 1974, it marked two events: First, the reemergence of the Weather-Underground Organization as an active participant in the ideological and political development of a revolutionary left in this country. Secondly, the existence of the document with which to push forward the unity of independent leftists repelled by what seemed the organizational dominance of economism and opportunism.

Prairie Fire is a contribution to an understanding of the problems and prospects of revolution in the most advanced imperialist country in the world. The WUO was strong in advancing the Leninist understanding that the essence of imperialism and the pivot of revolution is the relation between oppressor and oppressed nations, clear on the leading role of national struggles both within and outside the US, incisive on the devastating impact which white supremacy and racist ideology have had on progressive movements and class solidarity in this country, acute in acclaiming the tremendous contributions of the women's movement to the left. PF is self-critical, assessing the "left" errors and contradictions within their own development, and the strengths and weaknesses of the movement of the 60s. Prairie Fire puts forward the objectives of revolution in this era: national liberation and the proletarian seizure of power and the establishment of socialism.

On this basis Prairie Fire was able to attract people to take up the tasks of distributing and advancing the book; from this grew the PF Distributing Committee, in \_\_\_\_\_ cities, and the PF Organizing Committee.

However, while enthusiastic about the prospects of a reinvigorated movement that is of, not just for the working class, Prairie Fire is weak in clear strategic and organizational priorities.

On that basis, PF could accommodate a wide range of political perspectives.

It did! Within the first weeks of the exploratory national trip and the decision to form an independent political organization that would be responsible for the working class, the movement, and its members for its line and program, intense internal struggle broke out.

A genuine two-line struggle took place within the last year, with the advocates of both lines having reached greater clarity. Having been pushed, particularly by the evaluation of the Hard Times Conference, this struggle is reaching a decisive turning point.

At the heart of the struggle were the two questions at the core of the revolutionary process in the US: the Leninist understanding of the decisive relations of oppressor/oppressed nations and its understanding manifestation in the US, the National Question, and the question of Party Building. The 1st is the question of fundamental strategic orientation of the proletarian revolution, and the 2nd is the question of its leadership. These are questions forced by history on the national and class movements, and before the whole left. Within PFOC lines were drawn on theoretical, strategic, and organizational questions.

On the one hand, in those early months, stood a line, strong everywhere and expressed in the national leadership, that saw the movement as weak and isolated, due primarily to the failure to do mass practice; that aimed to rebuild the movement of the 60s (the appeal was to "oppressed peoples, women, and youth; SDS was the explicit organizational model); left forces were dismissed as immature and undeveloped, political struggle was seen as "devisive", ML study "dogmatic". Party building was a distant dream, "left" sectarianism the main danger and right opportunism something of which "we were incapable." Quantitative mass practice was the test of "radicals" and mass organization the objective.

On the other hand stood a line, rooted in California where struggle was sharpest but present in submerged form in most chapters, that defined the movement as fragmented and weak, but grounded that weakness in the absence of a leading political line, based in the realities of imperialism, embodied organizationally, and tested and developed in practice, that could unite communists, guide our work in the class, and enable us to take advantage (1) of the tremendous leaps in mass political consciousness generated by the defeats of the US in Vietnam and elsewhere, and the impacting political crisis here and (2) of the advances of communists in rooting themselves more deeply among the class and people, developing community projects, workplace caucuses, study circles, etc. This line took more seriously the role of political struggle both within and outside our organization, emphasized the protracted and vital struggle to grasp MLism and apply it to the conditions of our own revolutionary process, recognized that while "left" sectarianism is and can be a danger among left forces that right opportunism has been and continues to be the main danger, a danger to which neither the working class, its organizations, or our selves are immune. This tendency held that line, practice, and organization were to be evaluated by the capacity to advance the revolutionary unity of communists and guide and test their work towards the creation of a party.

Comrades and friends, the waging of principled political struggle is perhaps the most difficult task for our movement to master, encumbered as we are by bourgeois competitiveness, ego and chauvinism. As struggle developed in the last year friends were not always distinguished from enemies, principled politics were not always in command. Comrades were not always given the respect to develop positions and presentations, strategic implications were not always clear, alternatives not sharply etched. Persons within both tendencies will come in for criticism; all of us have a lot to learn from the process. Nonetheless, one tendency has a burden of responsibility for advancing a line, wrong and opportunist in its general thrust, which as a component part downplayed the role of struggle, and unleashed opportunism and commandism in organizational matters.

Assuming a level of unity (generally articulated by the book PF), the struggle in the Bay Area unfolded first around the organizational aspects of political line: where and how do you organize, what criteria for membership, what kind of decision-making, internal life and discipline? etc.

Organizational line grows out of the objectives you have for it. One line asserted that our line was assessable to anyone, that we should be an open mass organization, that internal decision making be based on consensus, that leadership flow from (part of) the group that first came together around the book.

By the time of the Boston Conference (July) practice on unemployment lines, in mobilizing support for the Vietnamese, in community work, had confirmed what the other tendency asserted: that support for self-determination of the oppressed nations and peoples, implicit support for armed revolutionary struggle, the call for socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat, the identification with and the desire to move towards full integration of Marxism-Leninism, was not a mass line at this time in history. Our attempt to be both a mass organization and to develop communist leadership within the working class condemned us to the futility of doing neither effectively. In the name of principle we put forth a political line inaccessible to most of the working class at this time. In the name of mass participation we structured an organization so that internal struggle, disciplined practice, and self-conscious study and evaluation were retarded. Leadership remained informal and inaccessible, therefore unaccountable and undemocratic.

By the time of the Boston Conference we had achieved nominal unity behind the objective of Communist organization, but the political and strategic differences behind organizational questions were sharpening.

The locus of struggle had shifted to how we view the current crisis of imperialism, analysed its impact, and defined strategic orientation that flowed from that.

One tendency asserted that the key was the fact that crisis drove down the living standards of the whole working class, thereby creating the conditions for overcoming antagonisms between nations and races, and between men and women, by organizing on a "class-wide" perspective around economic issues.

The other tendency insisted that the crisis be viewed as an overall crisis of imperialism which, while affected the class as a whole, deepened the material differences between the white sectors of the working class and oppressed nationalities, and between men and women, creating the basis for mobilizations to the right in defense of relative status, at the same time as it created the basis for raising political as well as economic within the white working class.

It is the content of Leninism in this era to uphold this anti-imperialist understanding, and the task of communists to develop it strategically, organizationally, and programmatically. It was this struggle that was suppressed in Boston, largely through the opportunist use of sexism directed at those men from the Bay Area who upheld a revolutionary line and the necessity of building communist leadership to implement it. This suppression in Boston, it is now recognized, weakened the organization as a whole by not allowing full debate and struggle over critical strategic questions. The opportunist charges of sexism in particular set back the struggle against male supremacy and sexism. First, by defining sexism in a narrow way and deflecting attention from the real material roots of women's oppression under Imperialism. Secondly, by identifying struggle over sexism with a factional and opportunist position, undercutting the capacity of women to raise correct criticism, and lessening the willingness of the men to listen. (See NC report).

From Boston the National Leadership launched the Hard Times Conference as the major strategic focus of PFOC, and the slogan Build the Class Struggle as the primary guideline. It is this work and its evaluation which has taken up (dominated? led our work?) most of the last ten months.

The Hard Times Conference set itself an audacious objective: to bring together leading revolutionaries and rank and file activists from struggles across the country, and from this to educate and strengthen each other, and to develop political guidelines and program that could maintain a fighting unity. The boldness and scope of the project is in the best revolutionary traditions; it is this more than anything which generated the massive response from over 2000 activists feeling their fragmentation and ready to respond to revolutionary leadership.

But the weaknesses of the HTC, for which Prairie Fire must bear primary responsibility, are also in the traditions of the left in this country: pragmatism, tailing spontaneity, opportunism, manifesting itself first and foremost in the downplaying of the roles and struggles of Black People and other oppressed Nationalities; in the liquidating of the struggle against male supremacy and for the liberation of women; and in abdicating the responsibilities of revolutionary leadership.

Though the conference had the active participation in planning and leadership of, and heard from speaker after speaker representing the national struggles and linking them with the overall class struggle, neither the conference documents, the structured political processes of the conference (workshops, caucuses, etc.), nor the programmatic suggestions reflected this strategic orientation. Political leadership was not forthcoming from PFOC as these criticisms were made through the conference, especially through the critical intervention of the Black caucus. As a result, deep programmatic unity has not been advanced. The conference and its evaluation have pushed forward all the participants, however, and the potential glimpsed in Chicago remains, challenging us to grow to the task of grasping it.

Now we are in the process of evaluating our line and our organization, strengthening ourselves and the left for the challenges ahead. What have we as an organization learned from this brief history?

\*It is not enough to be courageous, dedicated, committed, qualities which were displayed in the anti-racist struggles in Boston, the education fights in New York, the women's Vietnam Solidarity sit-in in San Francisco. We must also be correct! A wise political line guides struggle, mobilizes masses, strengthens organization and cadre; an incorrect line demobilizes and demoralizes, serving only the enemy.

\*We must develop and take responsibility for our own politics and organization on all issues and in all situations, leaving no doubts that we are committed only to the class, the movement, and our members, and willing to struggle on that basis.

\*If you fail to take up the struggles and needs of oppressed nationalities and peoples, if you fail to base strategy and program on the way crisis deepens wedges within the class, you undercut the very unity you hope to achieve through a "class-wide" perspective. Class unity will be built only if the white working class and its organizations firmly uphold the right to self-determination of oppressed nations and peoples and actively link with their struggles. Class unity will be built on principle or it will not be built at all. If PFOC had provided political and programmatic leadership reflecting this the great potential of the Hard Times Conference might have been grasped.

**\*\*If you down-play the role of conscious communist political leadership and struggle, if you minimize the role of revolutionary theory and the centrality of line, and put your faith in an uncritical acceptance of the spontaneous movement, in an oppressor nation you will bow inevitably to opportunist pressures, betray the needs and struggles of oppressed nationalities, and with them the strategic line of revolution. If there had been better struggle in PFOC the above error might have been averted.**

**\*\*The HTC was initiated at a time when PFOC itself had very slim roots in the working class and the class and mass struggles. Work to strengthen such roots would have exposed some of the weaknesses in line. We would have had a much firmer sense of programmatic possibilities and priorities with deeper experience on which to draw. Leadership detached from the masses will always be prone to error.**

Now we are engaged in a process of evaluation and rectification, strengthening our line and our organization for the revolutionary tasks ahead. We are setting priorities, deepening our grasp of revolutionary ideology, remolding ourselves through self-criticism and debate. We are playing a greater and more conscious role in the movement that is gathering across the land. More unified as an organization than ever before, we are committed to building the fighting unity glimpsed in the Hard Times Conference!

We celebrate the first anniversary of Liberation of Vietnam!

On MAYDAY we reflect on the struggles of the past and commit ourselves to the future of our working class and all oppressed peoples!

STRUGGLE TO LEARN!

LEARN TO STRUGGLE!

J.B. (Joe Barthel)  
For the Bay Area Chapter



# Self-criticisms from the National Committee

Alan Berkman

The Hard Times Conference was a watershed for the anti-imperialist forces in the U.S., for the P.F.O.C., and for myself. The entire conference, but most importantly the criticisms of the Black caucus, starkly revealed the bankruptcy of the line that the PFOC had organized around and had brought to the conference. I take full responsibility for developing and leading around this national chauvinist, male supremacist, and opportunist line.

The criticisms of the conference were the beginning of a process of criticism/self-criticism which has helped me to deepen and broaden my understanding of the fundamental errors I've made preceding and during my period of membership on the national committee. The conference brought to a head a two line struggle that has existed throughout the history of the PFOC: the struggle for politics based on a correct understanding of revolutionary anti-imperialism against a line that denied the centrality of oppressor/oppressed nations in the U.S., that denied the leading role of national liberation struggles, and that liquidated the revolutionary nature of the struggle against women's oppression. The correct line had been fought for consistently by Clayton van Lydegraf and other comrades in the Bay Area and other chapters; myself and other comrades in the National Committee fought for the opportunist line.

Through the process of criticism/self-criticism both in the N.C. and in the New York chapter, I have tried to trace the roots of these errors in my political development. I had become radicalized in the Civil Rights and anti-war struggles of the 60s, although it wasn't until 69-70 that I began to identify with the revolutionary struggle. Although not a member of SDS, I politically identified with Weatherman and the politics of revolutionary anti-imperialism. And while I had started reading Marx in 1967-68, I did not study it seriously until 1972. In the period from 72-74, I did prison work and was part of the medical team during the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973. By the time Prairie Fire was released, I considered myself a committed anti-imperialist -- I stood on my strengths. It was an arrogant assumption - one that denied concrete reality as a white male in a white supremacist and male supremacist society. It was an assumption that negated the necessity for constant struggle for correct political line against bourgeois ideology.

I helped establish the New York PFDC on a basis that put organization rather than politics in command. We never initiated serious study or political struggle around the line of the book. We became a distributing committee in the narrow sense of the term -- this was in contrast to members of the BAPFDC which emphasized study. In embryonic form, this was the beginning of a struggle in the organization on the primacy of political line.

Closely linked to the question of the primacy of line was the question of whether or not the PFDC should become a communist organization. When that proposal was made by a group of four people in New York in Jan. 1975, I fought against it. I fought for the concept of an organizing committee with two functions - to develop mass organization and cadre organization. In doing this I was in reality fight-

ing against the necessity to build revolutionary organization around a revolutionary line. I began to substitute base building for the necessity to develop a deeper proletarian line. Class struggle and revolutionary anti-imperialism began to become two separate issues. This dichotomy persisted and became deeper until the H.T.C.

In the period before the Boston Conference, I supported the calling of the conference. Members of the Bay Area chapter called it premature and stated the necessity for political struggle, especially around the so-called mass/cadre question. In a letter to the Bay Area, I generally supported the idea of the PFOC becoming a cadre organization but still stressed the priority of mass work. I mentioned the matter of the political line only to dispense with it by saying I "assumed" we had general agreement. The conference was called, and myself and others (particularly the national travellers) had succeeded in putting organization rather than politics in command. And by not putting politics in command, I also adopted a personalistic and sectarian view toward the political struggle within the BAPFOC.

Although I was not on the conference committee in Boston, I clearly identified with the line of the national travellers. And it was a disastrous and sectarian line. Political struggle over line and communist organization was suppressed; Van's paper on "Revolution Grows Stronger..." was not allowed to be presented. This paper, which I recently reread, is a model for linking the question of a revolutionary communist party to a truly revolutionary line. And where this paper posed the central issues of oppressor/oppressed nations, the leading role of national liberation struggles, and the revolutionary potential of the women's movement, I interpreted this as a refusal to engage in the class struggle. My substitution of mechanical base building for revolutionary base building was essentially complete. I characterized Van's position as sectarian and anti-working class.

And as Van's papers have pointed out, for communists in the oppressor nation, a mechanical sense of base building and class struggle is the historic road to opportunism. And myself and others at the conference who pushed for the HTC led the PFOC down that road. In an effort to build a mass base, we developed a program with national chauvinist and male supremacist politics. We completely bowed to spontaneity. We liquidated the national question in the U.S. and the leading role of national liberation struggles. We liquidated the struggle against male supremacy and sexism. We tried to build unity on the basis of the demands of the most backward elements rather than fulfilling our task of winning whites to the demands of the most advanced elements. I led in the development of this line.

I led in imposing this line on the organization. While calling for full political struggle in the organization, I suppressed the struggle that quickly emerged. I would like to give some critical examples.

Shortly after the July conference, Shelley and I went to the Bay Area to help resolve the contradictions there. But I went with a subjective and sectarian attitude, clearly identifying with Howie and Nancy and a minority "cluster." Having an opportunist line, I quickly labelled the line put forth by Van and others as sectarian and anti-working class. I denied that we were in the period of party-building. I launched an unprincipled tirade against Van at the end of a membership meeting. I "politicized" struggle by putting forth the incorrect politics and criticizing the revolutionary line.

Back in New York, I led in a sexist, arrogant, and commandist way. I viewed my task as "organizing" the membership. I treated the membership as implementers of an idea rather than as revolutionaries whose questions, criticisms, and suggestions were the source of ideas. I squelched political struggle. I used my theoretical knowledge as a club to intimidate my comrades, particularly women in the organization. I held back the development of the chapter.

By the time of the December National Committee meeting, I was completely involved in the opportunist line and in a bourgeois style of leadership. We read What Is To Be Done but didn't study it collectively; it is a polemic against bowing to spontaneity. I didn't apply this reading to my own line and practice. But a strong letter of comradely criticism from the BAPFOC offered another opportunity to rectify our errors; it raised many crucial points which we know were correct. I led an attack on this letter and characterized it as sectarian. I opportunistically accused Diana and Nancy of a lack of loyalty to the N.C. for signing this letter from the Bay Area Steering Committee. I effectively blocked political struggle about its content.

Another important example of suppression of political struggle came at the HTC itself. Laura and I were charged by the entire membership - the highest body of the organization - to put forward a series of amendments to the Preamble of the Bill of Rights on the issues of women's oppression and women's liberation, gay oppression, national oppression and imperialist war. After a struggle with Annie, Jennifer, and Russell, we decided not to put these forward. This not only violated any sense of democracy and accountability to the organization, but also liquidated any independent role for the PFOC. We were criticized at the time by Diana, Arlene, and Lance.

The line of the HTC affected all areas of the organization. My incorrect understanding of national liberation struggle meant that I could not understand the political essence of the prison struggle in the U.S. As a result, I continually undermined the legitimacy of the Prison Project in New York. National chauvinism and the betrayal of revolutionary anti-imperialism led me to struggle against the inclusion of the demand for self-determination for the Black nation in a paper on racism prepared for the HTC in New York.

Male chauvinism and a male supremacist line meant that I challenged the legitimacy of organizing women and undermined the struggle against sexism in the organization. I discounted the knowledge and experience gained in the women's movement by leading women cadre. This was personally damaging to the women involved as well as disastrous for the organization. I fought against a Women's Organizing Collective in the NYPFOC. I did not seriously take on the task of building women's leadership and never struggled for the priority of the National Women's Commission.

My lack of understanding of the primacy of line and the priority of building communist organization held back the entire organization. The study plan was inadequate. The political statement was delayed four months. I did not circulate position papers written by members of the organization throughout the chapters.

I did not build solid and organic links with the membership but instead functioned individualistically. I did not build the national committee collective in New York, specifically by not viewing it as a priority to

incorporate Silvia fully into the collective. These bourgeois styles of leadership not only damaged members of the organization, it also served as a model. This meant that it was sometimes duplicated by our cadre in their mass work. Thus, its impact was multiplied many-fold.

I made serious political error during the past year. The process of overturning these errors has been difficult for me and for the organization. Yet, rectification has been one of the most hopeful and liberating processes I have experienced. I have received comradely criticism that has helped me to understand myself and my politics in a deeper way. I hope that the energy liberated by this process throughout the organization will help us take a great leap forward in building a truly revolutionary communist organization.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Jennifer Dohrn

These are critical times. All around the world we see people rising up and fighting to win their independence and right to freedom - reclaiming their land, their culture, their people's right to control their own destiny. The victory of the Vietnamese people against U.S. imperialism opened a new era for the future of all women, men and children; it marked the beginning of the decline of U.S. imperialism. Since then, one nation after another has achieved its independence: Laos, Cambodia, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola - and the possibility for many more to be liberated comes closer each day. Within the United States, it is a new era for the potential of the liberation of the oppressed nations and working people of this country. It is a decisive time for communists to be organizing and leading.

Understanding the urgency of these times, the great potential for the development of anti-imperialist consciousness within this country, and our responsibility as communists within the oppressor nation has made me look gravely and self-critically at my role in leadership of the PFOC - that my responsibility in developing and leading around an incorrect line that abandoned revolutionary anti-imperialism and liquidated the national question has severe consequences not only for our organization, but for the growth of the struggle as a whole within this country. I am also responsible for developing an incorrect understanding of leadership, the importance of theory, and the necessity of building a communist organization.

First - my role in the building of the strategy for the Hard Times Conference. Our move to develop a class stand, which was a correct one, quickly became for me, as we started to organize for the HTC and write the initial call, one of abandonment of the principles that I had based my politics on for years: for example, the changing of our first draft for the call from including the victory of the Vietnamese marking the decline of U.S. imperialism; the defining of the crisis as an economic crisis rather than as a crisis in imperialism. Step by step I replaced the politics of revolutionary anti-imperialism with a chauvinist and economist line; the

subordination of the national struggles within the U.S. to the class struggle - "all for class unity" - which shortly became a liquidation of the national question and the elimination of the strategic alliance between national struggles and the class struggle; the development of a reformist line of the struggle of women - a line which eliminated the special oppression and struggles of women; the putting forth of solely economic demands which were supposed to "eventually develop political consciousness of the system". The only principled basis for unity - the right of nations to self-determination - was removed and replaced with an opportunist line, allowing us to unite with anyone having "hard times".

Why did this happen? One cause I could cite would be my feeling illegitimate and unsure of what it meant to develop a class stand, which allowed me to question the very principles of revolutionary anti-imperialism. I also thought that other forces, particularly leading Third World forces, would raise the correct issues. So if the PSP or the Nationalist Party did not raise the demand for independence of Puerto Rico in the initial call, I assumed it was not an appropriate demand. This abandoned my responsibility as a communist to put forth demands that would correctly develop anti-imperialist consciousness.

But more important in understanding the errors that I am responsible for is the understanding that this is the historical classical error of white communists within this country, and that my abandonment of these correct politics had historical precedent. When I look back at this past year, it seems as if I threw out most everything I believed in - my history having been one of deep commitment to the Black liberation struggle - and it has been through tracing the history of the left within this country and its relationship particularly to the Black struggle that I have both understood the criticalness of this error as well as the many forces that imperialism has developed to corrupt revolutionary politics with right opportunism.

Once I became rooted in this "new line", I fought for it as the only correct line within the PFOC. This led to the squashing of political struggle within the organization. Political struggle became for me the winning of acceptance to the line we put forth for the conference, and I labeled opposition as sectarian or not understanding the strategy of the conference, though many comrades tried throughout the months to object to the chauvinist and economist line being put forth. I downplayed the importance of theory with the argument that if we could only bring all these people together in Chicago, that would develop us farther along in theory than anything else. It was a reliance on the spontaneity of the people and removed the importance for developing communist organization. I put forth the position that the HTC was the strategy for building a communist organization. In that we developed relationships with many groups developing along similar lines as ourselves through the work of the conference, this has been important to our understanding the process of party building. But it was incorrect to see it as a substitute or full strategy for party building. In not fighting for a principled basis of unity, in not adequately giving attention to the development of the PFOC, in reliance on the spontaneity of the people to produce a national movement, in abandoning the necessity for leadership, I underestimated the centrality of our work in building for a communist organization. And as the conference got closer and closer, I argued that there was not time for political struggle - that the work for the conference in and of itself was primary.

In particular I squashed legitimate questions and struggles raised from the West Coast chapter, raised both in papers from Van, and in specific work on the HTC, raised consistently from Arlene (I am enclosing parts from several letters from Arlene which she wrote to me over the months of preparatory work on the conference.) I did not take these struggles to the full organization for debate and resolution.

I also think my leadership was very individualistic and bourgeois. It did not rely on the building of other leadership and the importance of collectivity. I created a small collective to refer all questions and debate to, and then presented the conclusions for acceptance to the organization. This eliminated real struggle within the National Committee, failed to build the national Hard Times-PFOC network, and did not build other leadership within the NY chapter. In NY I am particularly critical of my work with Marcy, who was co-ordinator for the City in the work on the conference and led the Hard Times collective within the PFOC. My withholding of the political issues from her, my not developing a collective relationship that would have enabled both of us to work out the day-to-day issues as well as the longer term strategy, resulted in her not having adequate political knowledge to base decisions upon, and prevented her from feeling effective as a leader. My individualist method of leadership was also the basis for my operating on the Board not as a representative of the organization. My role on the Board became defined for me as one of holding the Board together, of preserving unity, instead of carving an independent force of a communist organization that would have raised key questions such as the role of national liberation struggles and the oppression of women. (It was clear to see the basis for unity on the Board when at the recent Board meeting, March 1976, I raised our self-criticisms and clearly defined the PFOC's relationship to the Board in a new, independent way; it quickly revealed that many forces had allied with us because of our history of principled anti-imperialist struggle, and many had allied with us because of our "new line". By clearly defining our own politics, the struggles emerged much more sharply within the Board and gave us a better sense of evaluation for future work, than had ever occurred before, when we covered over struggles and pushed for unity for the sake of the Conference.)

I can now trace my incorrect conception of leadership not only through the development of the HTC, but back through the history of the PFOC. The conception of leadership being above struggle, instead of the result of political struggle, and therefore its "legitimacy" in squashing struggles critical to the lifeblood of an organization were evident in my behavior before and at the Boston Conference. Instead of allowing the two line struggle to be developed concerning the direction of the organization and the centrality of communist organization, I fought with the forces determined to eliminate or hide the political line emerging particularly from the West Coast Chapter, and allowed this suppression to pass under the cloak of a fight against sexism.

The process of rectification is a challenging one for me and for our entire organization. I am beginning to understand the real use of criticism and self-criticism, to have a new trust in the comrades of our organization as they are struggling with me to help me understand the errors and change my conception of leadership. It has enabled me to take full responsibility for the line and development of the organization in the past period and to also radically change and

help in the overthrowing of this line. I also think that this process has severe ramifications for the development of our movement. Not many organizations have made a turn down the wrong path and corrected it; our ability to do this, to thoroughly understand the mistakes and correct them, will be a contribution to the struggle. I welcome whatever criticisms and struggles that will help in this process.

Excerpts from Arlene Eisen-Bergman's letters

November 24th

THE POLITICAL ISSUES WE'VE BEEN DEBATING:

1. We've continued the debate that we began in NY about focus. Everyone agrees that we need to focus energies, but there's a lot of confusion about what that means in practice and a lot of fear about premature "narrowing." We need to get clearer that if the Hard Times Campaign focussed on one or two specific demands that means that other groups would incorporate those demands into their work, not drop everything they're doing. When Le Duan spoke about organization flowing from political line, it meant having an analysis that says X is the main contradiction, or the enemy's weakest link, or the place we can build the most unity (or some combination of objective and subjective reasons). Then, we can build an organization to deal with it.

Gurly (National APT Black Caucus) thinks we should be as specific as possible. DuBois has been arguing super-strong for his single focussed proposal (though he'll accept debt moratorium). Carlos is afraid of making our proposals too specific too soon, but he also fears being so broad and so open that we accomplish nothing. Mike Dawson (organizer of Black Workers Committee here and also staff member of Seize the Time who is also going to take major responsibility in Labor Core Group) thinks that we can have a three point program (like in the Call) but focus within it on jobs.

2. A lot of people have raised questions about the "reformism" of the Call. They say that the enemy needs to be identified more clearly. They want the Hard Times Conference to reflect the fact that there was a recent poll that said that 68% of people in the US didn't think capitalism could work. Want clearer commitment to fighting racism and sexism.

Some people, including Carlos, are afraid that demanding winnable demands is a bad strategy. We've been arguing that as long as we understand that reformist demands are not our goal, but rather incorporated into a strategy for building a revolutionary movement, it's OK. But I think that our lack of clarity on this point is partially responsible for Shinya Ono and I Wor Kuen and other Marxists-Leninists refusing to be on the Board.

The biggest debate on these questions takes place within PFOC and with WSO (Winter Soldier Organization) (who has been promising to give us a staff person for 2 months now and still hasn't, but probably will within a week or two.) and with Seize the Time. Sometimes they call the politics of the Hard

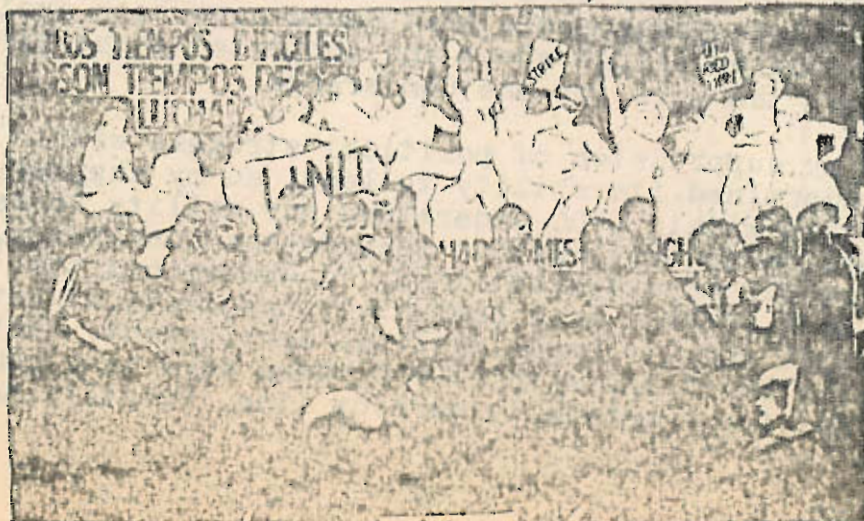
Times Conference "reformist," s metimes "economist," sometimes "centrist"--but the main point is that they're afraid we'll be opportunist-- and not raise anti-imperialist consciousness. They want more commitment for support to national liberation struggles within the US. Some, but not all of this criticism comes from Van's analysis that the working class is not "multinational"...that there is a workforce in this country that is made up of workers from many nations...sometimes he implies that the economic crisis will widen the gap between "workers from the white nation" and "workers from the Third World nations." He wants us to make a clear commitment to the most oppressed segments of the working class. Personally, I think that we must clarify our economic analysis of how we think the crisis affects the working class and its potential for unity. This is a priority that affects all our questions about demands etc. This analysis must be more specific than it has been.

3. We have not done any specific outreach to women's groups yet. Though our childcare core group is being organized, in part by the PFOC women's committee which focusses on childcare. At a PFOC women's caucus meeting the other night (after our phone call) everyone seemed to feel that the Conference should have some place to deal with "women's issues and organizing" that isn't totally integrated into "women at the workplace", etc....but we didn't have much discussion about this and frankly, I think it's a complicated question that involves alot of unresolved issues. We'd like to hear your thinking on this issue and discuss it further.

January 8th

At an expanded staff meeting last night we had a very complete political discussion of the document, and there was unanimous criticism of it. We decided to write an alternate one, pending what happens in the conversations between you and Carlos. I plan to write an in-depth report of our discussions and the feed-back we've gotten so far, but I want to get this letter out immediately-- so the political heaviness will come later.

Briefly, people think the Bill of Rights represents the classic right error...that it does NOT and MUST: have an analysis of imperialism in 1976 that talks about the crisis being permanent (I mean not just a low point in the business cycle) and the rise of revolutionary tide world-wide--some sense of militancy that comes from a certainty of victory rooted in a scientific analysis of imperialism, national liberation forces, the class struggle etc. It must have a separate section on National Oppression. It must have a separate section on women's oppression. Without these, both the national and the women's question get liquidated. There must be a section on undocumented workers and deportations.



## Russell Neufeld

I take responsibility for misleading the PFOC from July '75 through the Hard Times Conference. This misleadership included the development and implementation of an opportunist, national chauvinist, male supremacist and economist line that the PFOC brought to the Hard Times Conference. It included the suppression of political struggle within the PFOC as well as within the Hard Times Board. It included an incorrect line on the primacy of party building and the role of communist leadership in the mass struggle. By the July conference these errors had become dominant and overturned the correct initial direction of building an organization that had the full politics of revolutionary anti-imperialism. I led in the abandonment of those politics.

In the period since the Hard Times Conference, as these errors have been increasingly exposed and overturned, I have had the benefit of much individual as well as general criticism. This included, but was not limited to: the PFOC National Committee, collectively and individually; the NY/PFOC membership; the Coordinating Committee; the Hard Times Collective; the Workplace Organizing Collective; NY National and Interim Committee; the Chicago PFDC; the Boston PFOC Steering Committee and Roger Rice; Clayton Van Lydegraf; papers by Van Lydegraf, Arlene Eisen-Bergman, Nancy Barrett, Joe Hammill and Jeff Sokolow; the Sojourner Truth Organization, PSP, United Black Workers, CASA; the Hard Times Board; Dianne Boesch and Natalee Rosenstein.

A root of these errors, in my case, lay in being convinced that the main danger to our movement is left sectarianism. This came from a long-time revulsion at the amount of sectarianism that does exist, but mainly it came from not understanding the dominant danger of opportunism in the heart of imperialism. I took our revolutionary anti-imperialist politics for granted and thought I was developing a broader working class base for those politics. As part of legitimizing this rightward trend to myself as well as to others, I substituted the presence of women, Black and other Third World people and their organizations for the polit of their struggles. This was a racist and sexist practice towards those people and groups which was compounded by discouraging political struggle on the Board through a lowest common denominator, opportunist conception of unity. This also undermined the ability of the Board to struggle to a level of unity that would have allowed it to give real leadership to the Conference. It also contributed to a situation at the Conference where, because of the lack of strong solidarity with the national liberation struggles in much of the pre-Conference propaganda, the spokespeople for those struggles were forced to give lengthy speeches in order to educate the Conference participants about the reality of their struggles. This created a situation of antagonism towards those spokespeople that could have been avoided had we educated people about and supported those struggles throughout the work for the Conference.

As my suppression of political struggle within the Board undermined its ability to lead, so my suppression of struggle within PFOC undermined our ability to develop a correct communist position towards the Conference, to overthrow the opportunist line. It undermined the development of PFOC as a communist organization, both its theoretical and its organizational development. Both within the Board and within PFOC there were many comrades who fought for a generally correct line, identifying the

errors and struggling to correct them. Within the PFOC this came principally from the Bay Area PFOC and was forcefully argued for in December in a letter from the Bay Area PFOC Steering Committee to the National Committee. During my work on the Conference the primary person who struggled with me, through letters and phone calls for a generally correct position was Arlene Eisenbergman. Throughout this period I maintained an essentially liberal attitude towards the Conference planning and prop agenda. For instance, I saw the absence of articles on women or Black people in the Bill of Rights as "weaknesses" that needed to be "strengthened" rather than as the liquidation of those questions. I consistently dismissed correct criticisms as sectarian.

I fought for the wrong line both within NY PFOC and the National Committee. My major fear in NY was that we would become "internalized" and not "break out" of the "narrow bounds of the movement." I fought to relegate study and theoretical development to a secondary position. This contributed to disarming the chapter to struggle against the development of the opportunist line. Many comrades including Charlie Isaacs, Penny Grillos, Susan Rosenberg, Shelley Miller, Marcy Isaacs and Bob Cantor argued the need for study. Rather than arguing against the need for study, I argued for the priorities of practice which undermined the ability to devote serious time and energy to study. Even so, there were several good study groups, primarily led by the above comrades. A further blow to the role of theory and study was that by leading in an anti-democratic manner, people correctly felt that it didn't matter what they thought because they had no power. This led to study becoming a matter of abstract responsibility rather than an essential part of political struggle within the chapter.

Within the National Committee I "accepted" the criticisms of the above mentioned Bay Area letter in words. In fact, I dismissed it as sectarian by reading things into it that weren't there as a way of not dealing with its correct political content.

Although what I thought I was doing during the past year was building PFOC into a communist organization, I now understand that a bourgeois conception of organization dominated my work. The political rationale for this was an analysis of the anti-imperialist left's major weakness being isolation from the day-to-day struggles of masses of people. Practice was primary. This conception continued even after the slogan of the National Committee became "build the PFOC towards communist organization." Mass practice was the primary way we would become that; the Hard Times Conference was our primary mass practice that would transform us into a communist organization. I didn't understand what it meant that we had come together around the political statement of another organization in terms of the need for real basic struggle over politics in our own organization. This reflected both a passivity to the politics of the WUO and a wrong understanding of the role of political struggle for a correct line in building a communist organization.

As the Hard Times Conference came closer, I increasingly saw the PFOC as a vehicle for the implementation of the "correct" ideas of the leadership rather than a source of correct ideas that develop through the struggle of the entire organization. This is a pragmatic and thoroughly bourgeois idea of organization. In implementing this conception of organization I prioritized the completion of tasks in a bureaucratic and individualistic manner, and deprioritized the importance of political struggle, consciousness, cadre development and

collectivity. This contributed to the general lack of collectivity among the NY National Committee members and my particular failure to develop a collective relationship with Silvia Baraldini.

My underestimation of the role of theory, political struggle and line is related to my not understanding the correct relationship of communist organization to mass struggle, in general, and the relationship of the PFOC to the Hard Times Conference in particular. I thought that the primary place for us to look for a correct program of struggle would come from being involved in mass struggle and building relations with those groups that are involved, rather than seeing the starting point being the ideas we bring to those struggles. I didn't understand the necessity of communist leadership to develop mass struggle beyond the limitations of reformism and trade unionism. To see the leading demands as the spontaneous ones is to deny the force of bourgeois ideology, in general and white and male supremacy, in particular. It is to see revolutionary politics as sectarian; to liquidate the need for communist leadership and therefore the need for communist organization. Through leading in implementing this wrong line I undermined the development of the PFOC.

This was particularly evident in the struggles in the NY PFOC in January '75 over becoming a cadre organization and again at the July conference when I participated in the suppression of the majority Bay Area position on party building, as well as in the Hard Times work. Thus, the struggle for an incorrect position was accompanied by the suppression of the correct position.

I participated in putting forth the notion that only the unified working class could accomplish either revolutionary or immediate change. This wiped out the revolutionary content of the struggle of oppressed nations and women. It led me to argue at the December National Committee meeting that the best way to support Black liberation is to fight against the racism of white workers.

My view of the women's movement was similar. It was only to the extent that it was part of a unified working class movement that it could have any real power. I eliminated the revolutionary content of the struggle to resolve the contradiction between women and imperialism whose material base is the superexploitation of women maintained through a system of male supremacy. This male supremacist error in theory laid the basis for sexist practice within the PFOC. The very legitimacy of many women in PFOC who had developed as leaders in the women's movement was undermined. By liquidating the revolutionary content of the liberation of women, the struggle against sexism was less important (actually more important). My own practice was sexist in two respects which increased the closer we got to the Hard Times Conference. One was a paternalistic attitude towards several of the women I was working with in Chicago, particularly Shelley Miller, Susie Waysdorf and Ellen Afterman. I often saw their questions, anxiety and hesitations as personal problems that needed strong reassurances, rather than as political positions to be drawn out. The second aspect of my sexist practice was in the use of theory to quell struggle, rather than to raise it. This particularly had the effect on some women of making them feel stupid and unable to struggle. This happened at the December National Committee, in my response to the questions raised by Silvia Baraldini about the absence of support for the Black liberation struggle in the Hard Times Bill of Rights.

Penny Grillos said "there is human casualty to the errors in line." I know that part and parcel of undermining the development of the PFOC was the undermining of individuals within the organization. Many people have developed as leaders in this period despite the bad leadership that I and others provided. Others have been set back. There are some people whose political and personal development I specifically undermined. To those people and to all the comrades, I apologize.

I am fully committed to building the PFOC into a communist organization and to the process of criticism self-criticism that will make that possible. I appreciate the criticism of me that has been made and will work to apply the lessons of the criticism to my own practice and to generalize those lessons to the development of the entire organization and communist movement.



## Laura Whitehorn

The errors of political line and organization that we have made are serious ones - abandoning revolutionary anti-imperialism, the basis of opportunism, is the heart of counter-revolution in the U.S. As a founder of the PFOC and as organizational secretary since the July Conference, I take full responsibility for leading the organization in a revisionist direction. The errors in which I took a leading role include having an incorrect line on the building of communist organization, deviating from revolutionary anti-imperialism and specifically developing a revisionist line on the national question and an economist position on women's liberation, and beaureaucratic styles of leadership, including suppression of political struggle in order to quiet the dissent within the organization, to the course that the leadership independently charted.

In particular, I have been responsible, since the travelling that five of us did in 1974-5, for elevating mass work over the development of ideology. Seeing the major problem in the Left as its isolation from the masses of US people, I returned to Boston from the national travelling with a line that said "don't sit around and ask questions or study the politics of Prairie Fire, get out there and sell the book to the masses - that's how we'll develop our ideas." When members of the PFDC here objected to this approach, suggesting that we needed deeper discussions of the politics of revolutionary anti-imperialism, I suspected them of being "afraid of the people" - a gut-check to prevent political struggle over what I was convinced was a correct strategy for revolutionary work: to build mass organization. (I now feel that it is the lack of a unifying revolutionary theory and organization within the Left that is the central reason for the isolation of the Left from the people). This line on mass work grew from a strength of my work - a good style of mass work, and activism - but became a weakness without the theoretical development necessary to prevent the mass work from becoming economist and not building revolutionary organization.

The strength of my work at the early stages of the Boston PFDC/PFOC was to lead the committee in the development of an anti-racism committee which engaged in some study on the national question and racism, and which developed a technique of questionnaires to engage in struggle with white people in Boston about racism and busing. The high point of our work at that time was its activism and militancy to build an anti-racist presence in Boston (picket line and demonstrations). But the very strengths of this work - activism and militancy - eventually were transformed into a weakness by my failure to recognize the centrality of political education and struggle to develop the PFOC and to develop my own ability to lead. As a result of this weakness, we built a PFOC here that was united on the need for anti-racist mass work but not on the need to build a national organization of revolutionaries. Members of the PFOC here, and especially some members who left the organization because of the consistent failure of those of us in leadership to listen to their objections, have very strong criticisms of the way in which I organized for the July PFOC conference, silencing the opposition to calling the conference at such an early date. In doing this, I substituted bad and intimidating methods of struggle for the development of political unity on the need for organization.

With an anti-ideology tendency inherited from the New Left, and with my own low level of ideological development, I arrogantly insisted on MASS organization over the development of cadre organization. I think that the change that occurred shortly before the July conference, when those of us in leadership recognized that in fact we'd better start building cadre organization in order to build the long-term revolutionary struggle, we were more or less giving in to arguments that we could not answer - arguments put forward consistently by members of the PFOC in every region (but especially in the Bay Area) - rather than fully reforming our politics on organization and our strategy for building the PFOC. The speech that I gave at the July conference, where I argued for the "simultaneous" building of mass and cadre organization, reflects the shallow level of my understanding of communist organization, and provided poor leadership in failing to overturn the incorrect line on organization. Good leadership at that point would have included self-criticism of the previous direction of the PFOC, as well as beginning to develop a strategy for building communist organization, rather than merely asserting the need for one. At that time, I had no understanding of the danger of bowing to spontaneity - expecting socialist ideas and strategy to arise spontaneously from the conditions of life of the working class - and so I could only see the need for a party in the most long-term sense, as a necessity for the seizure of state power, but not as a necessary weapon of the people to develop and protect a correct political line and practice. As a result, I did not help to develop a strategy for building communist organization that would have been built on a dialectical relationship between mass work and organization building, rather than constantly opposing the two to one another. My refusal to listen to the strategy put forward by members of the Bay Area committee at that point was, I think, a result of looking at the PFOC as somehow the property and responsibility of those of us who had done the travelling. And I distrusted putting emphasis on ideological struggle, which, I thought, would take away from the mass work that I then saw as primary.

Failure to overturn the incorrect line on organization led directly to a wrong strategy for building the PFOC towards communist organization - a strategy that

consistently subsumed cadre development and political struggle to mass work and the Hard Times Conference. I pushed the publication of GROUNDSWELL, arguing that putting out a paper with our political line reflected in it would be helpful to our mass work and to organizing new people into PFOC. This approach skipped the critical step of building our line and unity within the membership of PFOC as the basis for taking a political line out to other people. I also helped to develop a strategy for the HTC that based the development of political line on "going to" other forces in the revolutionary movement BEFORE the ideological struggle within the PFOC over line and strategy. This approach effectively liquidated cadre development and organization within a mass coalition, and led to a criminal liquidation of the national question and anti-imperialist politics within the revisionist Bill of Rights. It also led to similar errors in the line of the editorials in GROUND-SWELL, which Alan and I must take full responsibility for - although the editorials are not signed by us, we wrote them along with Russell and Jennifer.

In the Hard Times Conference work, my responsibility for liquidation of revolutionary anti-imperialist politics is particularly clear at several points. In my December NC report, I trashed the Bay Area Steering Committee's correct criticisms of our work in the coalition. The Bay Area was at that point putting forth a different strategy for the HTC, one which would not obliterate communist organization and a correct line on the national question. At that time, the strategy we had developed for building the HTC - a strategy based on bowing to spontaneity and hoping that a good line would come out in the end - was utterly threatened by the position argued by the Bay Area. At the conference itself, I suggested that a women's caucus should not convene if it was going to be predominantly white. This position wiped out the strengths and the ongoing development of the women's liberation movement, and reduced the question of women's oppression to a side-effect of class exploitation. I was also substituting Third World attendance at the caucus for the politics of anti-imperialism - hoping that the presence of Third World women would speak against national chauvinism in the women's movement, and thus abdicating our responsibility to argue for and build an anti-imperialist women's movement. (This error also effectively wiped out my own history in the anti-imperialist and Marxist-Leninist sector of the women's movement.)

Then, on Saturday afternoon, I betrayed both our organization's line and membership by compromising the positions decided upon at the PFOC caucus meeting and giving in to a position that argued we should not raise our changes and additions to the Bill of Rights at the plenary session. I agreed to not raise our full changes to the document, and to not lead off the plenary by being the first speaker. This error opened up the door for the liberal and chaotic plenary session, and failed to open up good political struggle over the revisionist Bill of Rights. This was a liberal, bourgeois strategy to offer something to everyone and downplay the role of political struggle, coaxing people to hang in there in the PFOC or the HTC because it will somehow answer everyone's needs, rather than leading in the development of a correct and hard-nosed strategy for revolution. In practice within the revolutionary forces in the oppressor nation, this strategy leads to an opportunist selling-out of the demands of the oppressed nations, which must be accepted by members of the oppressor nation in order for unity to be built. PFOC members, and especially ABB urged me and fought hard with me throughout the HTC to understand this.

Since the HTC, it has become apparent how our approach to building the PFOC - underplaying the role of political education and struggle, and bowing to spontaneity - has underdeveloped us as cadres. In pushing forward the convening of the July PFOC conference before PFOC members here felt ready to deal effectively with questions of organizational development, I hoped that somehow bringing us all together would produce a national cadre organization. In pushing forward the HTC work, I hoped that bringing together organizers from all over the country - anti-imperialists and working class organizers - would somehow produce a strategy for building national mass organization. What was pointed out by both the Black Caucus at the HTC and by members of our own organization was that in the absence of a firmly stated political line upholding the right of self determination for oppressed nations and upholding an anti-imperialist analysis and strategy, no revolutionary progress can be made amidst the dominant ideology of the US - bourgeois, national chauvinist ideology. There is no middle ground between a correct proletarian ideology and the ideology of the imperialist bourgeoisie, and we must arm ourselves with a political line and organization to create a strategy for revolution in the US.

## State of Membership

### Bay Area

The need for rectification in the Bay Area Chapter goes back farther than the Hard Times Conference and the political errors our organization made there. As early as the Boston national conference, divergent political tendencies were present in our chapter. Many times the struggle in the chapter broke down into personal attacks. We later came to understand that the essence of this uncomradely struggle was indeed political; a bad political line inherently uses unprincipled struggle in order to defend itself.

The errors of the HTC brought these tendencies to a head and politicized our understanding of them. We viewed the error of Chicago as having 3 aspects: 1. the liquidation of the national question, 2. the lack of understanding and liquidation of women's oppression, 3. the ignoring of the centrality of party-building in our strategy and practice. Firstly, the comrades who led around the wrong line were talked to individually and asked to criticize their work at a mass meeting. A chapter-wide study program was initiated using three papers written by Bay Area PFOC criticizing and evaluating the HTC (Class and the Meaning of Chicago, Spring Cleaning I and II). Also we read Lenin's Imperialism in order to remind ourselves that imperialism is not a "policy" of the ruling class as our HTC work tended to perceive it but rather its very essence. These papers and Lenin were discussed at an all day meeting where the self-criticisms were presented as well.

The presentations went well and sparked good discussion especially since we were all so well prepared for the meeting. It was generally felt that we were weakest on understanding the relationship of party-building to strategy and practice and therefore discussion on this aspect was shortest. The comrades who gave self-criticisms approached their task very seriously and the fruits of

were political education in their form as well as content and advanced the understanding of the chapter around the errors as well as of the use of criticism/self-criticism. One sister traced her political history showing how easy the flip-flop from left "military" error to right opportunist error is. A brother talked about his tendency towards sectarianism and overly aggressive struggle. After months, it felt like the air was finally getting clear.

Generally it was felt that a tremendous leap forward had taken place in our chapter and that already the still unfolding process of rectification added much in the way of developing line in PFOC. However it has become increasingly evident that rectification not be viewed solely as an internal process but must be used to reach out and advance the movement as a whole and specifically to give self-criticism to comrades we work with.

B.W. (Barry Weinberg)  
for the Bay Area Chapter.

## Boston

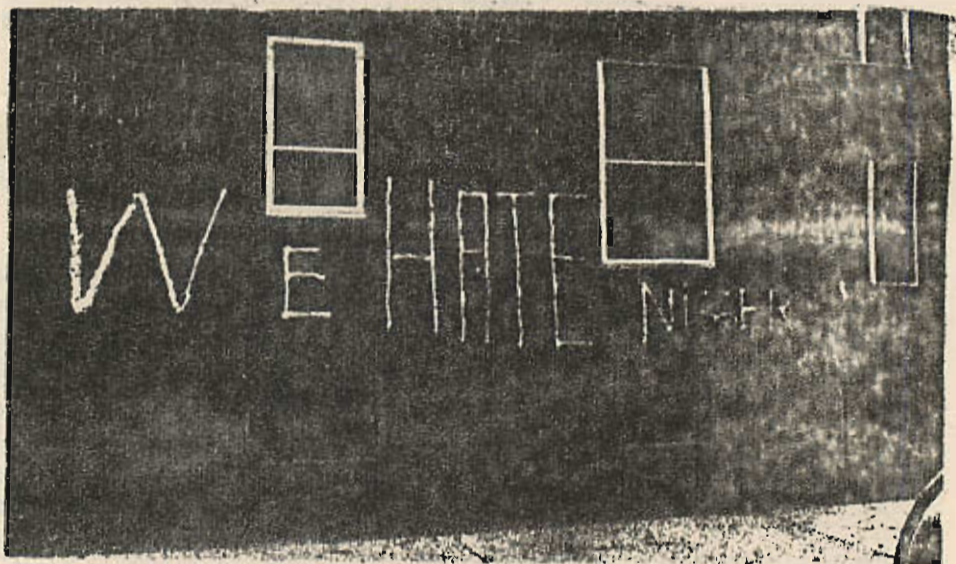
The errors in the pre-Hard Times Conference period, both in political line and in methods of leadership and organization, have had a deep effect on the Boston PFOC. The effect we see perhaps most clearly now is how damaging the Hard Times work was on the building of our cadre organization. Boston leadership concentrated almost entirely on the Hard Times work since the July PFOC conference, and as a result little attention was given directly to the development of the cadre or the organization. We see now that to have focused so strongly on a national conference of such a mass character, that deviated so seriously from our anti-imperialist politics, was not a strategy to help build communist organization.

One result of this has been the loss of many members, perhaps one third of our previous membership, since the Hard Times Conference. Since the July conference we have had 25 members, now we have 15. Who left the committee? Most were people who had joined since the July conference, but several had been members of the PFOC since last spring. Why did they leave the PFOC? For several different reasons. Some people left because they did not agree that communist organization should be built now, and were confused about becoming Marxist-Leninists. Some left because they did not get the support for the base building work they were involved in (several hospital workers, and a day care worker), and because the leadership continually didn't listen to their arguments for the importance of base-building work, but rather only went deeper into the work of building for the Hard Times Conference. These people felt that to stay in PFOC meant making a choice between their base work and the building of an organization. Others left PFOC over a more basic disagreement with line, namely that the priority of our work should be for us all to get full-time jobs, 'go to the workers', and build organization later.

The HTC work did not have the active support of the membership. From July through January, we continually struggled to 'mobilize' the rest of the PFOC behind us, and for members to 'better grasp the meaning of the Hard Times Conference'. This approach suppressed real political struggle that should have happened about the meaning,

Times Conference. Instead, people's most basic questions were left unanswered and unresolved, members who supported the HTC worked on it, those who didn't support it, didn't work on it, and alienation became more and more rooted in the Committee. At the same time, questions about base-building and communist organization, political line were increasingly subordinated to the building of the Hard Times Conference.

Part of the problem here actually goes back before the HTC, to the debate over whether PFOC should be a mass or communist organization. We went into and left the July conference with a very shallow understanding of communist organization, what it means to develop cadre, and the importance of political line. We did not overturn these errors through the work on the HTC - instead they became increasingly entrenched. Until recently, we did not have a scientific approach to bringing people into the PFOC. Boston leadership often led a low level of political struggle within PFOC, in order to avoid conflict and political differences which might cause people to leave. As a result, leadership underdeveloped the membership, and disarmed them ideologically. Before and after the July conference, PFOC members in Boston expressed feeling out of touch with the rest of the national PFOC. Others argued that to build a national organization would take away from strong local organizing. These questions and doubts were never resolved. At times the Boston leadership most based in the national work pushed ahead with things, such as the July conference and the HTC, without the support and backing of the membership, in order to 'keep up with the rest of the PFOC'.



Wall of South Boston housing project. Credit/Peter Kent

Since the HTC, the Boston coordinating committee has been involved in an extensive evaluation, criticism/self-criticism, as part of the rectification process. Each of our individual roles and also our collective role in the errors was evaluated. We felt that this was very important, but we are critical that we haven't brought this evaluation of the coordinating committee more deeply into the larger membership. Our initial rectification meetings of the whole Boston membership, one of which included Van, were very strong in discussions about political line. But there was not extensive response from the membership in criticisms of the leadership. Members felt somewhat anxious about the rectification program and expressed a feeling of 'wanting to get

Another key aspect of our situation in Boston is the concrete conditions themselves - busing situation, racist organization and racist attacks against Black people. As people have probably heard, the situation here has escalated seriously in the last month and a half. The enclosed leaflet is our analysis of the situation, which we put together for the planned national anti-racist march which was to have taken place here in Boston last April 24. The march was called off by its organizers two days before it was to happen, because of the 'climate of racial hatred in the city.' We plan to put together a more detailed description of the situation here for the next newsletter. Right now we want to describe some of the immediate work we've been doing. We've been actively involved in defending the homes of several Black families in a white neighborhood of Boston - Hyde Park. The homes have been continually stoned, firebombed; the people themselves physically harassed and assaulted, by the white "neighbors". For the last couple of weekends we've organized PFOC members and other comrades to spend the evenings and nights at the homes of these brave and determined Black families.

We are also involved, with other groups of anti-racist organizers, in developing a broader strategy for this defense work and for ending the racist attacks. This might include developing our anti-racism committee into a broader coalition, or trying again to build PARIB (People Against Racism in Boston). We encourage PFOC members from other chapters to come to Boston to help in this work.

- The Coordinating Committee

## Columbus

In discussing rectification with our sisters and brothers throughout the U.S., we want to preface our remarks with a brief history of the Columbus Prairie Fire Organizing Committee.

Shortly after the July meeting in Boston, the 3 people attending the conference from Columbus called a small meeting of friends and movement associates. Some of us had read Prairie Fire. Others were familiar with some of the book's politics and some of the Weather Underground Organization's politics. All of us agreed that there was a need for national organization and that Prairie Fire was a good ideological base.

We came together from many struggles: tenant organizing, food co-ops, trade unions, women's organizations, prison struggles, media collectives, gay struggles -- all of us profoundly changed by the anti-war movement and proud to have played a part in the defeat of U.S. imperialism in Viet Nam.

We organized as a Prairie Fire Distributing Committee. There were 24 of us. From August to October we distributed Prairie Fire, Oswatonic, and Puerto Rico Libre! at bookstores city-wide, at the National Lawyers Guild National Executive Board meeting, at the Uhuru Festival, at the Community Festival. We participated in a rally for Joann Little, leafleted the national headquarters of the Rockefeller-controlled Borden, Inc., and organized a solidarity dinner in support of Puerto Rican independence, raised money, food, and equipment for the Mohawk Nation at Ganieskah.

Partly this response is due to the fact that many of the members who had been the most critical have dropped out, and were not present at the post-HTC meetings. Partly the response is because people in the Boston PFOC still feel fairly isolated from the national PFOC, and also feel the press of the events and situation in Boston itself - the attacks on Black people, and the developing fascist ROAR movement. The rectification program can be seen to members here as just another national PFOC issue. At the same time, there is a strong commitment from those who remain in Boston PFOC to figure out a strategy for how to grow; and the quality of political discussion and struggle in the membership meetings is markedly better. We've been going back to ex-members to elicit their criticisms of us as PFOC leadership, and to discuss with them why they left PFOC, and how we can build better ongoing relationships.

We are presently concerned with what appears to be a developing contradiction between the rectification program and the ongoing work of the PFOC. How do we rectify the weak state of the Boston PFOC as a communist organization and at the same time answer the urgent need of white revolutionaries to build the anti-racist struggle in this city, which takes time and energy? (And both without a well-worked out longer term strategy for our work as communists.) There is a growing tension between carrying out the criticism/self-criticism process within the coordinating committee and the general membership, and taking our discussions outside the PFOC to our other comrades in the city. We think that the development of an organizational strategy for this period must include both aspects of this developing contradiction. There are in Boston a large number of anti-imperialist organizers with an independent line who are involved in different kinds of organizing (day care workers, tenant organizers, women organizers, hospital workers, cultural workers). Perhaps the greatest strength of the Boston Hard Times work has been the relationships we've built with many of these people, who are now open and anxious to work with us, to hear what we're doing, thinking and planning. Many of these relationships are very important breakthroughs for us here in Boston, and we feel that in developing a strategy for communist organization we must engage in formal discussions, and where possible, study with these people. Some of us are already involved in study and discussion groups with people outside of PFOC, that have formed off of the Hard Times work. Similarly, there have been significant breakthroughs through the Hard Times work in relations with Black activists, involved in struggles for jobs for community people. And our relationship with PSP has been deepened and changed qualitatively over the past months. The active deepening of these relationships will play an active part in our developing strategy.

With 15 members, 10 of whom are active, and 5 of these 10 who relate to PFOC on a daily basis, we know we need to grow. But we also know now that growth is not just a matter of numbers. As explained above, we're now more than ever before analyzing our strengths and weaknesses, and our potential, in the context of the larger anti-imperialist Left in this city. We're asking the questions, 'What is the purpose of communist organization', 'What work should we be doing', 'what other groups, collectives and communists can we join with?', 'who are we responsible to?' The struggles against internalization and for rev'l anti-imperialism inside and outside of PFOC are key ones.

In late October, about the same time we began receiving literature about Hard Times organizing, we reorganized our committee work. We decided that without a local program, our strategy would develop haphazardly and lose continuity over time.

We also assessed our strengths as well as our weaknesses in Columbus. Our base was white, living around Ohio State University, mostly working within community organizations. We had some contact with organized labor and only occasional contact with the Black community. The Hard Times strategy seemed to us a good tool to expand that base.

Yet problems with the strategy were present from the start. A number of people on our committee raised questions about the conflict between the wording of the conference demands and the realities of our struggles here.

Many of us had fought for community control of federal programs and felt that demanding "adequate" services was taking a step backwards. Others felt that political demands raised broader issues than economic demands. Finally, there was a conflict of raising economic demands no one felt could be achieved without raising the demand for social revolution, a political demand.

We held back from raising those criticisms because we lacked the theoretical background necessary to understand what was happening. Consequently, our committee abdicated its responsibility to criticize our national leadership.

One form that this abdication took was "they (national leadership) have been working longer on building the conference, so we (Columbus PFDC) should trust their judgment." Another was "we shouldn't raise those criticisms because unity is fragile at this point and our criticisms would appear dogmatic and tend to disrupt rather than unite."

As a result of our committee posture on criticizing the national leadership, theory was downplayed, collective study ceased to exist, and mechanistic unity (which became the political line of the conference) became everything in our local work. The December visit of Susie Waysdorf and Laura Whitehorn only reinforced our non-critical attitudes while valid criticisms by local left comrades were treated like vicious attacks. Still, we managed to organize 40 people from Columbus to attend the conference.

By January 30th, we had become an organizing committee, had stabilized at 10 people, had established a few strong contacts in the Black community, and had deepened our ties with organized labor. We had also dropped all other committee work such as distributing, study group organizing, prison work to build for the conference.

Briefly, our criticisms of the Hard Times Conference are:

(1) Too many speeches; the Tribunal was too orchestrated..

(2) The Bill of Rights seemed to parrot the bicentennial notion of looking to Washington and Jefferson as our radical heritage. It was unwieldy and much too lengthy. Also, it never dealt with the special oppression of women nor the right of self-determination of Black and Third World people.

(3) Workshops were poorly organized. There was too little time to cover the Bill of Rights, exchange organizing strategies, no mechanisms established for post-conference rank and file communication (a national newsletter, exchange of addresses, publication of the conference roster).

(4) No time for caucuses. The Ohio caucus was born from the Hard Times Conference but at the expense of someone's speech. Also, Ohio and Western Massachusetts were the only two regions organized at the conference.

(5) The Action Program was unrealistic. Although we organized a regional demonstration 15 days after a local action, the difficulties of that will be covered in another report to the national organization.

(6) PFOC leadership abandoned its role in the conference. We feel that our national leadership forfeited political input to the National Board by placing more importance on mechanistic unity (PFOC's role as logistical staff) and by eliminating caucus time for developing unified PFOC positions at the conference. Our leadership was out of reach. Not available for comment. Too busy "running the conference." This standing-apart hurt many of us personally as well as politically. People on our committee that had housed, fed and played with national PFOC leadership left the conference feeling ignored and abandoned.

That brings us to the present. First, we must criticize ourselves for not sending this report to everyone much sooner. We are still struggling with many programs and we tend to over-extend our commitments. Second, in dealing with rectification we must first deal with the treatment we have been accorded by the national leadership.

Following the conference, we were told that some in the national leadership would visit Columbus. There has been no word on that visit in 3 months. Our criticism of PFOC national leadership being insensitive to our committee has not been dealt with.

Van's visit did our committee a lot of good. It heightened our awareness of the significance of struggle over political line, the need to know Marxist-Leninist theory, and brought out a collective sigh of relief that we were not isolated in our criticisms of PFOC national leadership. But it did not absolve the responsibility of the national leadership to follow up on their promise to visit Columbus.

Outside the organization, Prairie Fire people have been active in putting our politics out front. In local Hard Times organizing, we have spoken out on the need to draw anti-imperialist lessons from local struggles, on self-determination for Black and Third World people, and on the special oppression of women.

In the Ohio Caucus we are organizing for a state-wide May Day action in Columbus. In caucus meetings Prairie Fire people have spoken out on self-determination, women's oppression, and the need to characterize this period as U.S. imperialism in decline outside and inside of the Imperial U.S.

On May 2nd, we will be spending the entire day discussing the rectification papers we have received to date. We are also organizing study groups and raising our economist role in Hard Times organizing as both a self-criticism and a method of learning how to recognize economist organizing.

This is our report. We hope that our comrades will take this report seriously. We encourage other chapters to begin communication with each other as it is important for us to know each other personally as well as through our national leadership.

This report contains many criticisms and is the result of some bitter emotions. They are offered in the spirit of love and comradeship.

In solidarity and struggle,

Columbus Prairie Fire Organizing  
Committee

P.S. -- We hope the news that Toyota or Volkswagon will build their first U.S. plant in Ohio makes you as happy as it does us. We are looking forward to closer relations with auto workers.

## New York

The political character of the New York chapter can only be understood in the context that it was the chapter most deeply entrenched in the wrong line publicly and dramatically exposed through our practice and conception of the Hard Times Conference. The National Committee people most responsible for the development of that line were largely centered in New York. We will attempt to trace the most serious manifestations of that line as it specifically took root in the chapter and put forward our views on how New York is moving and must move in this period of National Rectification.

### A WRONG LINE COMES FROM A WRONG WORLD-VIEW

The three days of the Hard Times Conference exposed in a most profound way our abandonment of the strategy of Revolutionary Anti-Imperialism; primarily, this manifested itself in the historical error of national chauvinism, the non-recognition of the primacy of the demand for self-determination and democratic rights for oppressed nations and oppressed national minorities. This error was allowed to flourish because we did not understand party-building as the central task of Marxist-Leninists, and therefore could not grasp: 1) the primacy of developing correct political line around which to build a communist organization, and 2) the relationship between mass struggle and communist leadership. It was this setting which served to bolster our most backward views of communist organizations and which allowed us to put organization rather than politics in command.

Our New York cadre have strong background in anti-imperialist work -- Vietnam, prison struggles, solidarity with the liberation of the Black Nation, organizing women, education and community work; but the unclarity and almost hidden two-line struggle of our founding conference sowed the seeds for the entrenchment of a bourgeois world-view and literally pulled our revolutionary anti-imperialist work and consciousness out from under our feet. Most of the National Leadership centered in New York had historically struggled against communist organization (see Alan Berkman's self-criticism). Thus, is the absence of clear political line, our world-view was not based firmly on proletarian ideology but was allowed to degenerate and bolster our dominant ideas (bourgeois ideology).

-- We characterized this time in history as an economic crisis instead of the crisis of U.S. imperialism in decline.

-- We lost our conscious connection to our Vietnamese comrades, the people of the Black Nation and other oppressed nations within the U.S., as fighters against the common enemy - our enemy - U.S. imperialism.

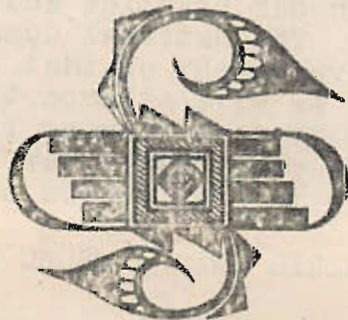
-- We misunderstood our responsibility as communists in the oppressor nation to base our politics first and foremost on the struggles against all forms of national oppression, on the right of nations to self-determination, including secession, and for full equality and democratic rights. This is national chauvinism.

-- We liquidated the special oppression of women because we did not have a materialist analysis of it. Male supremacy reigned supreme. Women cadre who had years of experience giving anti-imperialist leadership to the women's movement were made to question why they should bother organizing women. Theory was used as a weapon. Women, particularly, were made to feel stupid and incompetent by men who were trained to think in abstraction, an ability that is learned and historically denied to women.

--Our incorrect analysis of male supremacy prevented us from understanding gay oppression, which resulted in our lack of support for gay liberation.

From this point on, it was impossible to salvage the Hard Times Conference. So, we see the "errors of the Hard Times Conference" not as an aberration, but as a logical outcome of a bourgeois world-view.

Our comrades of the Bay Area were characterized as anti-working class and sectarian. The New York membership was not only cut off from understanding our connection to people around the world who are fighting U.S. imperialism, but also from other chapters--most clearly the Bay Area.



The Hard Times Conference took up almost all the energy of our people from November on. The idea of uniting the working class to fight for economic demands came from good intentions. Certainly, communists must always be concerned with the suffering and hardship of our people. Revolution is not only the most decisive way of ending the intolerable conditions of peoples' lives, it is also the shortest and most humane way of doing so. But communists bring Marxist-Leninist science to the people, educating them to the necessity of revolution, helping to root out the old ways (ruling class ideas) and nurturing proletarian ideology in its place.

It was very serious that we also misunderstood the nature of the class struggle in the U.S. We liquidated the right to self-determination of oppressed nations within the U.S. We relegated the fight against national oppression to secondary importance. We ignored the special oppression of women. We did not understand the fact the material, political and social disparity between the oppressor nation and oppressed nationalities was widening, not disappearing. As a result, it was impossible for us to advance a program which could truly lead the working class struggle.

By raising only economic demands, we not only liquidated the role of communist leadership but greatly underestimated the intelligence and deeply felt desires on the part of the people for a better life, and their ability to fight for political change. Our demands pandered to the most backward sectors of the class instead of the most advanced. It was opportunism that made us think that we could only unite the working class on the basis of economic demands.

Once again we underestimated the revolutionary potential of the white worker, and left it up to Black and other Third World people and leaders to organize the white worker to support national liberation. What this does is liquidate the historic task of white communists, which is to organize white workers to struggle against national oppression and for self-determination and democratic rights for oppressed nations and national minorities. In its essence, therefore, the concept of the Hard Times Conference was not only national chauvinist, but also anti-working class. This is not at all to pass judgment on the 2200 people -- honest and committed comrades -- who attended the Conference and reacted favorably to the resolution of the Black Caucus.

#### POLITICAL LINE AND ORGANIZATION

The dismissal of the primacy of political line (in the New York chapter) meant that 1) there was no guiding principle or set of ideas on which to hold each other responsible to the organization and to our class; 2) collectivity and strategy became impossible and frustrating things to develop - (on what basis does one build collectivity?); 3) National Leadership was divorced from the organization. It was able to develop the line of the conference somewhere else and lay it on the membership, and 4) political struggle was not welcome, but became a painful nuisance while the fundamental dialectic of democratic centralism was swept away -- all centralism and no democracy.

We developed a bureaucratic attitude toward our work because both study and political struggle were occasional rather than consistent practice. Therefore, the Hard Times Conference was going to do everything -- build a fighting movement, build a mass base, build relationships with Black and other Third World organizations, transform the P.F.O.C.

It is crucial to understand that because our cadre were denied the tools to conduct political struggle (study), people felt stupid and incompetent. Leadership was seen as a thing "smart" people do. Lack of study meant often that peoples' ability to articulate questions, doubts, etc. was undermined. We often felt powerless. All of us had big questions on our minds, questions based on our practice, on the national question, on the woman question, the role of reforms, communist organization. But nowhere was this thirst for knowledge satisfied. People were left to find books on our own, or call a friend who might have an answer. This was another way for the wrong line to entrench itself. Our cadre's abilities to be critical and self-conscious were not encouraged through study but we often groped in the dark for our answers. This undermined political struggle and encouraged bourgeois notions of leadership.

The act of denying people knowledge is one of violence. Our cadre were not seen as a valuable source of new ideas, theories and criticism, but as objects to go and implement the line of the National Committee. This is clearly anti-communist. It must never be allowed to happen again.

Thus the organization as a whole suffered, not only New York. Political questions were covered over through form, for example in the discussions of the role of intermediate demands which became a cover for opportunist politics.

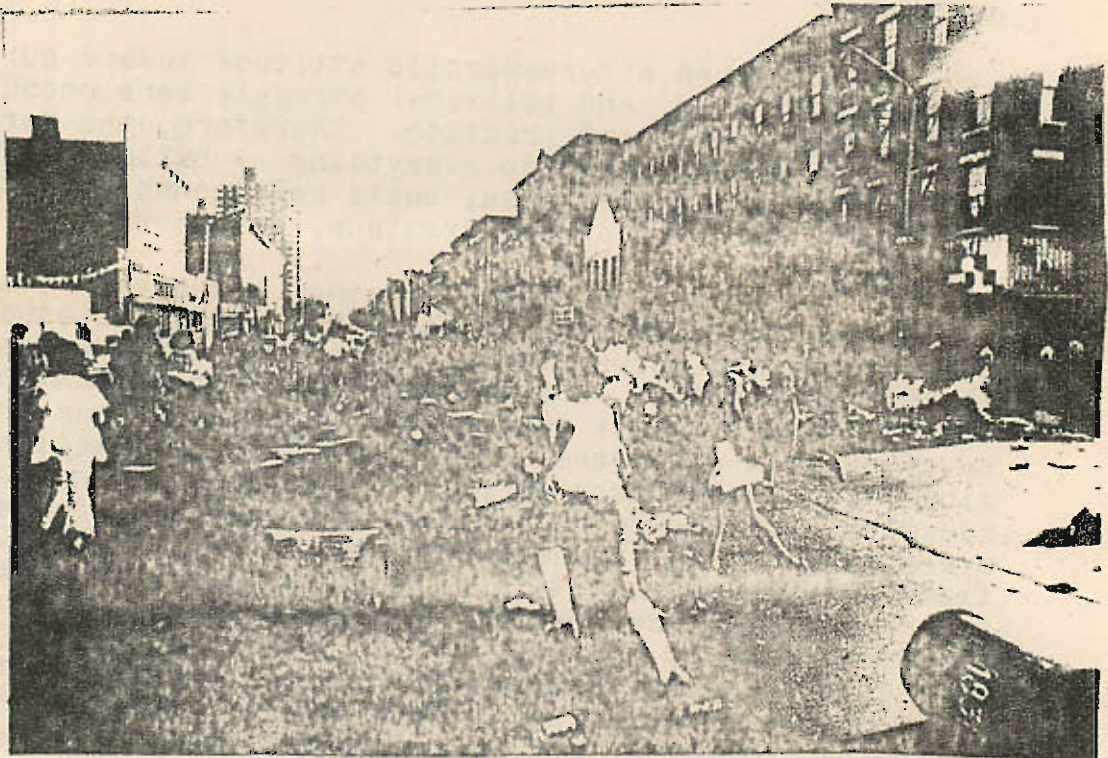


## IDEAS AS A MATERIAL FORCE AND COMMUNIST MORALITY

People often learn about a thing through direct contact with it. Our ideas of political leadership and political struggle were set by the model offered by the NC. These ideas were magnified ten-fold in our work in mass organizations and in our contacts with comrades of other organizations. When honest people offered comradely criticism of the Bill of Rights many of us were defensive and gave shallow answers. So, wrong ideas about leadership were carried out not only in the internal life of N.Y.P.F.O.C., but also in our mass work.

The important thing here is that we laid the basis for self-fulfilling prophecies. The N.Y. membership was treated disrespectfully, so many of our members in turn treated others in the same manner.

Here is where our ideas connect to an essential part of the ideology which we want to develop. That is, communists not only think Marxist-Leninist thoughts, we also treat our people and comrades differently than the way our boss, teacher, or landlord deals with us. Communists welcome political struggle and study as a way of advancing humankind. Communists respect people and are always open to hearing about new ideas and suggestions. Communists are patient. Clearly, it is a constant struggle to act differently, to bring our actions into harmony with our ideas. But to expect less of ourselves is to denigrate the struggle and misunderstand how protracted it will be.



RECTIFICATION

The process in New York has been slow. Our full Interim Committee had its first meeting on April 14. To a great extent this happened because we struggled in the chapter over the political conception of the Interim Committee. For a period of time after the March NC meeting, collective political leadership was abdicated. We were involved in deep criticism/self-criticism which dealt primarily with the methods of leadership. The self-criticism stopped short of analyzing the political roots of our error; this made it difficult to consciously move ahead. Without a forward-looking view, the tendency to become demoralized takes command. Both the Interim Committee and the Coordinating Committee are becoming more offensive in outlook and coming out of our doldrums.

The process of deepening the criticism of the National Committee is happening. A big part of this is rooting our NC people in collectives so as to regain a deeper sense of the membership and to develop more accountability to the organization. Now every member of the organization is in a collective in which he or she is engaging in consistent political struggle.

There are three very important qualitative changes that have happened in New York:

1) A general agreement as to the primacy of developing political line. General agreement has been reached on the centrality of building a party -- we are in the process of discussing this further.

2) There is agreement that study is vital -- particularly at this moment -- as a component part of developing political line. Many of our members are taking matters into their own hands and are reading up on the national question especially. This initiative and self-reliance is a good thing, though of course we look forward to the next study sessions developed by the Bay Area.

3) Waging the struggle against male supremacy. (See article by Eve Rosahn for the Women's Commission). Previously, the struggle against male supremacy and sexism was waged in a private manner. Small meetings were arranged between women and men to deal with particularly blatant sexist incidents. Because we now understand the priority of developing correct line on women, we also understand how that struggle has to be waged in an open and public manner and not as a personal problem.

Of course these new understandings then lead us to ask further questions like:

-- How is line developed and where do we begin?

-- What is the relationship between study, political struggle and mass work? (How does the development of line reflect itself in the real world?)

-- How do we firmly re-anchor ourselves in the revolutionary anti-imperialism to which we are committed and open up the struggle to other organizations and comrades? (The process of struggle over the Public Statement drawn up by the Bay Area has exposed political differences in the chapter which can now be dealt with, but our inexperience with political struggle makes people feel pressured into a reply.)

-- What is our strategy? Which questions do we tackle first? Do we ask what is the relationship between the oppressor and oppressed nations? What is the principal contradiction in the U.S., what does it mean that party building is the central task, what is the difference between multinational and international, under what conditions do women become the carriers of male supremacy? How does male supremacy affect our ability to organize, particularly women? How does it subvert the struggle against sexism in the organization?

These questions are facing us in all chapters and we should encourage each other by sharing ideas about how to move forward. We view this newsletter especially as a means of waging struggle.

A big weakness in New York is the fact that we have not had a full membership meeting since March. This was a conscious decision of the chapter that we now want to change. This is a priority. People have been meeting in collectives as a way to deepen our understanding of the past period and conduct struggle in smaller groups, but the time is right to meet as a whole so as to prevent isolation from each other.

Our Coordinating Committee has been going through serious and deep collective and individual evaluations. These evaluations are illustrating how a wrong line affected our individual as well as collective practice. (When we are through we plan to write a report for the newsletter). We are struggling over the concept of a leading body for New York -- what are its tasks, how should it function, what are the criteria for serving on a leading body?

These are the main features of Rectification in New York so far. The main obstacle facing us is how to wage political struggle in a thorough and consistent manner. The main self-criticism of the Interim Committee so far is that we have

not been totally successful in opening up struggle in our chapter. We think the reason for this is that we have been task oriented and we are just beginning to plan meetings self-consciously where political struggle has to be waged, and in which political education is conducted on recent P.F.O.C. documents.

We are moving ahead with a renewed sense of confidence and dedication. We look forward to waging struggle as a national organization and send our regards to all our comrades.

Penny Grillos  
Interim Committee

## Philadelphia

This is a summary of what is happening with the Philadelphia PFOC. Instead of going into depth around each of the aspects of our situation and work, we want to touch on the major strengths and weaknesses and the major struggles here in Philadelphia, so all our comrades around the country can have a clear idea of what we are dealing with since the HTC.

There are 7 members in Philadelphia, 2 women and 5 men. We have been joined recently by 2 comrades from the Vermont PFOC. The women do not meet formally as a caucus. We have an office in the home of one of our members. We have developed through our practice close working relationships with the PSP, YAWP, PRSC and NASC.

### PHILADELPHIA SCENARIO

The Bicentennial push is intensifying on the level of media propaganda and ruling class-sponsored activities such as parades, multi-media events, etc. The commercialism attached to it is horrifying, from red, white and blue trolley cars to "special bicentennial deals on furniture, appliances", anything and everything. Working class people here particularly in the Black and Puerto Rican communities, are becoming more aware of the profiteering and white-controlled nature of the "celebration". It becomes even more obvious as economic and police attacks on Third World people and workers increase. While allocating millions for bicentennial projects, essential services are being grossly cut back. The only public city hospital, Philadelphia General, has been ordered closed by the mayor, city council and the courts. This particularly affects a larger number of people in the Black community and there is now a major organized community resistance and protest against the closing down. Simultaneously, the public transit system has called for a raise in fares on busses and subways, from 35¢ to 50¢, cutting even deeper into our pockets. Child care centers are being systematically closed down, city workers are being laid off and the city wage tax is being increased.

The heightening of these contradictions has led to an intensification of racist and police terror in the Black and Puerto Rican communities. Weekly, there are police murders of Black youths, and racist attacks by whites upon Black and Puerto Rican people, including firebombings and shootings. The controversy over desegregation, at this point unresolved, has helped fan the flames of racism among whites and led to increasing tension in general.

## OUR CURRENT WORK

We have been mainly working in 3 areas, while at the same time relating in a supportive role to other struggles. Our work, in both the PRSC and NASC has been ongoing and in general our goals in both organizations have been the strengthening and broadening of these groups, with particular emphasis on generating support and commitment from people outside the PFOC. This has taken much energy and effort. Our commitment to the consolidation of these organizations, as well as our commitment to building a strong anti-imperialist perspective within them, remains strong.

The third major area of our work is with the July 4th Coalition, where our role here in Philly is central. We have one member as a staff person in the Coalition office and 2 other people working on the Organizing and Outreach Committee. We are now in the process of evaluating our role in the Coalition (to avoid the position of being "the glue" that is holding it together) and simultaneously working out a PFOC strategy for organizing at the base level, in our community and at our workplaces.

Other struggles we are working with include support for a coalition for the liberation of Southern Africa, the Philadelphia Women's Union, solidarity with a Puerto Rican family, 5 of whom were killed when their home was firebombed by white racists, and organizing health workers (we work at 3 different hospitals in Philly). In addition, we have organized and led ongoing study groups around the book and the national study plan.

## INTERNAL STRUGGLES AROUND THEORY AND PRACTICE

Internally, we are confronting a large number of contradictions in our theory and practice. In terms of theory, they fall into two areas: ideological questions around our political line and organizational questions around how we organize ourselves.

The struggle over our line in the HTC has opened up many of the essential political questions which, prior to the Conference, were kept in the closet. What we have uncovered, is that general agreement with the politics as expressed in Prairie Fire, without full struggle around the major positions in the book is not sufficient unity to build an organization. We believe that the conception of the PFOC, based on that document, was premature and lacked the necessary political discussions and struggle which could have given birth to a strong political line to organize ourselves around. At this time, having examined and evaluated what we feel are essentially correct self-criticisms of our HTC line, we are now stepping back and struggling with some political questions that were drawn out by the HTC and by some comrades from the Bay Area. What does self-determination mean? Do we believe there is a Black nation? Do we believe every white person has material privilege and how does that affect the role of white workers? What is the relation between the national liberation and class struggles, between women's liberation and class struggle? Where do we stand on the Sino-Soviet question?

These questions are the leading internal political struggles, and we have not fully resolved them. Yet we feel a pressing necessity to develop positions and unity around them, for lack of a coherent organizational line has inhibited our ability to practice our politics in a responsible and unified way. (We view this contradiction around undeveloped political line and ongoing

practice as the principal reason for our lack of a strategy and collective understanding of our work and our organization; there has developed a clear individualistic tendency among us.) This contradiction has raised important organizational questions such as what does it mean to be in a communist organization and to want to build a communist party, how do we work as cadre, how do we relate mass work and issues to the developing of an overall organizing strategy?

Our practice as an organization has been heavily affected by these questions. We have been working in mass organizations and coalitions without a sense of belonging to a cadre organization and without a well-developed political line. This is irresponsible. In particular, without a strategic and collective understanding of our tasks during this period, our mass work has dissipated. We have neither expanded our organization by recruiting new people nor built support for the PFOC in our communities and workplaces. In particular, leadership in Philadelphia has failed to clearly understand and consistently respond to the needs of the organization. The things we have understood most clearly in these past days is that we must take full responsibility for our actions, and without a strong unity of theory and practice, without a clearly defined program based on the objective conditions of people in struggle we cannot organize ourselves nor will we be successful in organizing masses of people. It is an arduous process we are involved in. We will continue to struggle. We believe that consolidation of our organization and the development of a strong and unified political line are critical during this period of rectification and growth. In closing, we urge all chapters, all members of the PFOC to mobilize ourselves around the July 4 action to be here in Philadelphia or in L.A., for it is on that day we must together demonstrate our militant commitment to anti-imperialism and socialist revolution.

## Our Program

### Half the Sky



The New York chapter came off the HTC, not only with a developing understanding of how our line had been incorrect, not only with the realization that the chapter leadership had held back the development of communist organization, but also with a list of personal casualties a mile long. And it is no accident that the people on that list are women; women whose personal and political growth was stifled and whose experience and knowledge was undercut. Much of the energy of the Women's Caucus has been going into trying to fully understand the various manifestations of sexism, and what they have meant in each of our development. (We're in general agreement with the ideas laid out in the NC Report as to the roots and forms of the narrow, economist view of organizing women that developed over the past several months. People should read the section on women for the political basis of this article.)

The struggle against sexist practice is being called the 'Wash Your Face Campaign' after a similar struggle in China: "The phrase 'Wash Your Face' came from Chairman Mao himself who had many times explained that the thoughts

of revolutionary leaders inevitably became spotted and stained by the corrupt habits of the past and the rotten social environment that surrounded them on every side, just as their faces became spotted and stained by the dust and dirt of the natural environment. These spots and stains had to be washed off frequently just as people daily washed their faces to make them clean again. And just as one could not see the dirt on one's face without consulting a mirror, so one could not clearly see one's own bad thinking and bad behavior without consulting the people who suffered as a consequence of both and could therefore reflect a truer image."

This article will discuss the primary ways that an economist line and sexist practice among men played themselves out in NYC. These were not isolated to NYC; by sharing the experience of women in NYC, I think that women and men in other chapters will recognize patterns in their own work.

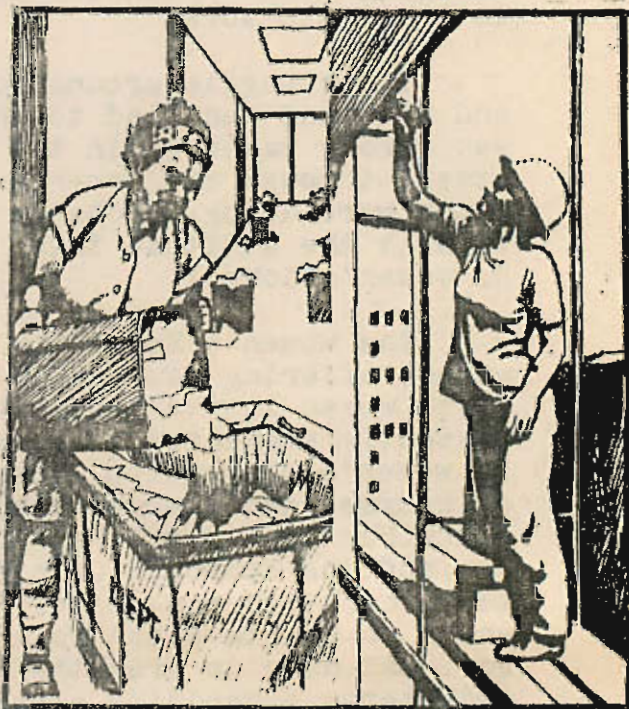
The struggle around our line on organizing women and how that was tied to the work of individual women was rarely taken up in the open. More often, it showed itself through the non-recognition of the work that women were doing. Probably the most glaring example of this is the attitude taken towards women working in the NY Women's School.

The Women's School is a school run by women for women, offering courses and educational events, primarily to women in the community. The Women's School has consistently presented a clear, anti-imperialist analysis of women's oppression. These politics have guided the choice of courses and events (incl. classes on Marxism, Lesbianism, Black History, Intro. to Women's Liberation and Imperialism and the Economic Crisis), and the political activities the School has worked for (Organizing a contingent of 50 women to Puerto Rican Solidarity Day; work around the Nov. 1st demo to free the five Puerto Rican Nationalist Prisoners, organizing a bus to the HTC, for example.). The School is becoming more and more based among women in the neighborhood, and is an anti-imperialist presence in the women's and lesbian movements in NYC, and to some extent nationally.

The Women's School also has strong ties to PFOC. Almost half of the women in PFOC/NY worked on setting up the School, and five women in the organization are working there now. The School was one of the groups in the city that received the clandestine edition of PF, and took on distributing it to women's groups and women prisoners. A recent women's recruitment study group, the only such study group that the New York chapter has led, drew several women from the Women's School.

The question of the legitimacy of work at the Women's School was, in fact, the question of the legitimacy of the autonomous women's movement. It came out in such instances as a conversation between Marcy and Alan, in which Alan questioned the rightness of PFOC women working at the School because it wasn't "a location of class struggle"; in other words, unlike a workplace or a tenant's struggle, it wasn't a place where people came into direct confrontation with the bourgeoisie. He, in fact, was reflecting an attitude towards the women's movement that was developing: that said that only organizing women around their immediate material oppression, defined in the most narrow forms, was "real". This view negated the power of the women's movement in identifying and fighting other, central forms of women's oppression: The power to control over our bodies, the oppression and exploitation of women in the home, the oppression of lesbians, and the way that women are denied access to the information and theory that help us understand the roots of our oppression.

All this is not to say that there shouldn't be struggle around different views of the women's movement and how to organize women. But this struggle has never taken place; what has taken place is an almost complete non-recognition of the work that PFOC women are doing in the women's movement. At no time has it even been raised that a mass form in which between 5 and 10 PFOC women are working be discussed chapter-wide; at no time, with the exception of the conversation I described, have more than



a few of the men in the chapter seriously discussed the Women's School with any of us who are based there. It seems safe to say that if the work was not in the autonomous women's movement, but in some other area, that it would have been so completely ignored.

An irony in all this is that women in the chapter were chosen to take on specific responsibilities around the HTC in large part because of their experience organizing at the School and in the Women's movement. It was on the basis of my work at the School and in the women's movement that I took on the job of organizing women to the HTC. It was on a similar basis that Marcy was struggled with to be local coordinator of HTC work. Both of us were then led to question the very practice and experience that had built us as organizers. We began to distrust our own good political sense, our abilities to make political decisions and determine strategy for our work. The effect of PFOC's line on women was to dismiss the autonomous women's movement as racist, petit-bourgeois to its core and, ultimately, more reactionary than progressive. The choice is not between unquestioning support of the women's movement as a whole, and unquestioning opposition. The choice is between respect for the work of cadre in our organization and not; between carrying out open, political struggle and undermining and delegitimizing women's organizing and individual women's self-respect and political confidence.

Another instance where PFOC's errors around women came together with a general sexist disrespect for the work of individual women is in the case of Vicky, a woman in the CUNY Collective (CUNY = City University of

The core of the CUNY Collective is a group of people working at Lehman College. Vicky had been for a long time the only PFOC woman working at Lehman; at her insistence and with the support of the Women's Caucus, another woman from the chapter began to work with the collective. The contradictions sharpened when a group of students occupied a building at Lehman to save open admissions and free tuition and to stop the city cutbacks. PFOC participated fully in the takeover, and Vicky was one of three PFOC members elected to the building steering committee. At a SC meeting, Vicky announced that a meeting of women in the building was happening, and that she would have to leave the SC early to attend. The two other PFOC members on the SC, Dan and Rolly, argued against her going, saying that "we have to set some priorities." They also argued that the women's caucus was illegitimate because it would be composed primarily of white women, repeating the errors we made at the HTC and denying both the validity of women meeting separately and our responsibility as white communist women to organize white women around the questions of national oppression.

Vicky went to the caucus in spite of their objections, and led the women in presenting a criticism of sexism to a meeting of all people occupying the building. In that meeting, men from PFOC argued that morale in the building was low, and that the women's presentation undermined it further. (They clearly didn't see the oppression of women as being divisive or demoralizing.) When Vicky struggled with the men in her collective, she was accused of being "hysterical" and "too aggressive."

Vicky has consistently been a leader in organizing at Lehman where she's done a lot of work at the Women's Center and in the collective. She has just as consistently been undercut by the sexism of men in the collective and in the chapter as a whole, and her work devalued. Her ability to lead in the building occupation, to grow within the organization, and to organize women have been seriously hurt by the attitudes and line of men in the chapter.

Another area where our narrow understanding of male supremacy has played itself out is in our understandings of gay oppression. We have substituted our self-satisfaction at being one of the few organizations on the left that has paid lip-service to the need to fight gay oppression for a commitment to arrive at a full analysis; we have substituted the fact that gay women and men are members of PFOC for a commitment to fight gay oppression. In discussions in PFOC/NY about gay people and the HTC, we reacted far more to real and assumed past errors of the gay and lesbian movements than we did to the oppression of gay people under imperialism. We were also racist in that we saw the struggle of gay people as automatically being opposed by Black and other Third World groups at the HTC, and thus saw the addition of a specific article on gay people to the Bill of Rights as divisive. This was in effect to say that only white people can change, that only white people can be struggled with around questions of male supremacy and gay oppression. This led us to limit our actions around gay oppression at the conference to a speaker opposing the gay article (who fortunately never got to speak) rather than in any way raising the fight against gay oppression as a legitimate one, and led to the isolation and undermining of gay people in PFOC at the conference.

The Women's Caucus in NY is hoping that struggle with men in the chapter around their sexist behavior towards women that they work with can both change that

practice and further our understanding of how sexist attitudes are reinforced by an incorrect line. We also don't want to fall into the trap of saying that sexist behavior is the result of the political errors we've made. A correct line on the woman question is one important step towards dealing with a lifetime of conditioning to male supremacist attitudes, but it is one part of the struggle.

We are also trying to understand how some women on the National Committee also led around the liquidation of the woman question. It is important for us to draw out which aspects of this come from women acting as carriers of male supremacist ideology; and which are reflections of political differences which need to be struggled around. (In this process, we have to draw the distinction between women passing on sexist ideas, and men acting in a sexist fashion. The crucial difference lies in the power and privilege that men derive from male supremacy in US society.)

In analyzing why women in the chapter didn't struggle better with what we knew were political errors, the question of line is clearly primary. We ourselves weren't grounded in a full understanding of the interrelationship of male supremacy, white supremacy and imperialism. We operated more from instinct and experience than from a sound theoretical basis; this allowed us to distrust our correct understandings and make political flip-flops during the period leading up to the Hard Times Conference.

Work around the Hard Times Conference pushed us to ask good questions about the women's movement, and about how to understand the class oppression of women. We saw, though, the failures and criticisms of the women's movement as primary over the oppression of women, so that our conclusions didn't result in a clearer idea of how to organize women. The sexist treatment of women in the chapter built on our political confusion, which led many of us to internalize the disrespect we were given. The 'Wash Your Face Campaign' is one way in which the damage done to individuals and to the politics of revolutionary anti-imperialism can be rectified.

BUILD AN AUTONOMOUS WOMEN'S MOVEMENT :

FIGHT MALE SUPREMACY :

FIGHT U.S. IMPERIALISM :

Eve Rosahn  
Women's Commission



FIRST A GREETING TO ALL MY SISTERS,  
COURAGE, ESPECIALLY TO ALL OF MY SISTERS  
UNDERGROUND IN AMERICA. STAY FREE,  
STAY STRONG. I INTEND TO FIGHT ON IN  
EVERY WAY AS A LESBIAN, A FEMINIST AND A  
IMAZON.

THE LOVE I SHARE WITH MY SISTERS IS A  
FORMIDABLE  
WEAPON THAN THE  
POLICE STATE CAN  
BRING AGAINST US.  
KEEP GROWING,  
KEEP STRONG,  
I AM A FREE  
WOMAN, AND  
I CAN KEEP STRONG.  
PASS THE WORD,  
I AM UNAFRAID!

-SUSAN SAYE



## July 4th

The central questions raised by the July 4th work are essentially the same ones raised by the Hard Times Conference; what is the political basis of unity of anti-imperialist forces? what are the leading and unifying demands in this period? But the context in which we ask these questions is different in the two coalitions. In the Hard Times work, we were the initiating group; three leading Third World organizations have initiated and led the July 4th work. Two of these groups - AIM and PSP - are under direct attack by the state for the role they are playing in national liberation struggles. I believe that we should view our participation in this coalition from the perspective of being a communist organization in the oppressor nation with a responsibility to support the efforts of leading Third World organizations to build a united front. This does not mean uncritical support, or that we do not struggle within the coalition, but it does mean that we recognize our primary responsibility to organize white people around anti-imperialist politics and to avoid an arrogant and national chauvinist attitude toward the Third World organizations in the coalition.

A national conference was convened at the end of March to officially call for the demonstration, to decide on slogans, and to elect a national board. The major political struggle at the conference was over the demand raised by several Black organizations that a basis of unity must be the recognition of the right of self-determination of the Black nation. We spoke in favor of this demand. There was little opposition voiced at the conference itself.

This issue re-emerged, however, when the Program Committee met several days later to finalize slogans. The African People's Socialist Party raised the slogan of "National Independence for Colonized Black People in the U.S." This was strongly opposed by the Oakland Black Panther Party which raised the slogan "Self-determination for all Black, poor, and oppressed people." Each group linked its participation to the inclusion of its slogan. The "compromise" proposed to the Interim Committee was that both slogans be included. We argued that the Panther slogan obscured the meaning of self-determination and undercut both the slogan of the African People's Socialist Party and that of CASA - "Self-determination of Mexican People". The compromise position won although the Panther slogan was placed with slogans concerning democratic rights while the APSP slogan stayed with the other slogans concerning national liberation. This struggle might well re-emerge at the next National Board meeting.

The other major struggle around slogans concerned the proposed slogan of "Equal Rights for Gay People". Three positions were put forth. 1. We and several other groups felt that this was a principled demand that should be included. 2. Some members of the Interim Committee felt it should be included so that the gay movement would participate in the demonstration; and 3. the PSP, KDP, and Fightback agreed with the demand in principle but felt it should not be included as one of the major slogans. The slogan was adopted although some groups have changed their minds, and want the slogan reraised at the National Board Meeting. There are now no Black or Third World groups on the Interim Committee that support this demand. This issue should be discussed throughout the organization.

The major struggle throughout the past month has been to maintain the overall anti-imperialist nature of the demonstration and to achieve a deeper unity about the leading role of the demands of the oppressed nationalities and of women. There is a constant tension about whether "broad sectors" of people, white people - can be mobilized around the demands for national liberations and democratic rights as well as the economic demands. It is part of our responsibility to make sure they can be. Another struggle around the politics of propaganda has been around the projection of U.S. history. We have agreed not to use terms like "The American Revolution Continues" and not to analogize the Revolutionary War to current national liberation struggles. We have decided to concentrate on the glaring contradictions in U.S. history and current society and not to try to reach unity on the overall history of the U.S.

It's clear from the written propaganda that the July 4th Coalition is repeating some of the errors we made in the Hard Times work. Black participation is still limited. But I think that we should keep in mind that we did make those errors, and that we must avoid an arrogant attitude toward those leading this coalition. I urge that we actively participate in the planning and organizing for the demonstration in each of our cities. Part of our participation should be the development and use of our own propogande. Van has suggested that nationally we prepare a pamphlet on the history of the U.S.

I also strongly urge that each chapter have discussions both on the slogans concerning self-determination for the Black nation and on the slogan of Equal Rights for Gay People before May 15th. I will be in touch with each chapter to get feedback on these discussions.

Alan Berkman

