

As part of our appreciation of the life and work of Steve Zeluck, we are reprinting one of his last political articles. The subject of the essay, the development of Lenin's conception of the party and its relation to the tasks of constructing a revolutionary organization in the US today, was one of Steve's central concerns during his last decade of political activity. In many ways, this essay provides the theoretical foundation for Steve's energetic pursuit of a revolutionary Marxist regroupment in the US.

For Steve, Lenin's conception of the party was the result of a historical and theoretical production process. In other words, Lenin's ideas were not "revealed truths," which suddenly emerged in an unalterable form in 1903. Instead, they were the product of conscious involvement in, and contemplation of the living class struggle. Thus, Lenin accepted the Kautskian notion of an "all-inclusive" working class party until the beginning of the first world war. It required the "orthodox marxists" (Kautsky, et al.) betrayal of international socialism in 1914 for Lenin to realize the need for a separate organization of revolutionary workers and intellectuals.

From this conception of the Leninist party as the special organization of the "organic intelligensia" of the working class, Steve was able to grasp the necessity of a revolutionary Marxist regroupment in the US. Steve clearly realized that there is no "party" in the US today. None of the existing scattered revolutionary cadre and unorganized revolutionaries have the material resources nor the relation to the working class needed to either effect the class struggle nor elaborate a strategic perspective in the US. Only a regroupment, on the basis of a common revolutionary program and practice, would allow revolutionary socialists to begin to overcome this situation. On the one hand, a regroupment would provide revolutionaries with the "critical mass" needed to effectively intervene in certain arenas of the class struggle and social movements. On the other hand, a regroupment would allow us to share our partial experiences and strategic insights in political discussion and debate aimed toward elaborating a strategic perspective for the US.

Finally, Steve's conception of Leninism and his party-building perspective for the contemporary US led him to emphasize the centrality of socialist democracy in revolutionary organizations. The freest discussion of differences, and all that it entails (rights of minorities to organize within the organization, to publish their views in the organization's press, to discuss differences with sympathizers, etc.), are both unavoidable and necessary. Only the "corrective of differences" allows us to overcome the effects of heterogeneity of the working class and its vanguard, the isolation of full-time leaders, and the limitations of our partial experiences and knowledge.

We hope that the publication of this essay will encourage a renewed discussion of these questions and aid the actual process of revolutionary Marxist regroupment in the US. The editors of ATC encourage our readers to send us their comments and criticisms.

The Evolution of Lenin's Views on the Party Or, Lenin on Regroupment

by Steve Zeluck

It is customary to start any discussion of socialist organization with some references to Lenin, or Gramsci, or Mao, or sometimes even Debs. That will not be our point of entry, even to an article about Lenin, in part because the situation in the U.S. and its Left today makes another starting point more useful.

If the growing movement or mood for socialist regroupment is to go anywhere, it must certainly face up to the fact that at least one of the sources of the Left's suicidal fragmentation has been of the Left's own making. I refer of course to the bureaucratic elitist organizational practices, norms and theories of most revolutionary organizations today. Democratic practice is not a question of making a virtue of necessity (to facilitate regroupment), but is the core of a revolutionary socialist organization, just as democracy is at the heart of any effective socialist economy.

Lenin's name has often been invoked to justify revolutionary organizations' departures from democracy. This kind of "Leninism" ignores the real evolution of Lenin's thought about the party. In what follows, I suggest that: 1) until late in his political career Lenin did not have a "Leninist" vanguard theory (commonly attributed to him as of 1902), in the sense in which it is understood today. Until 1914 he had an essentially Kautskian view of the party. 2) This conflict between the Kautskian party model and Lenin's politics caused him and the movement no end of confusion and trouble. 3) Lenin's

"democratic centralism" was not at all what it was (is) supposed to be. 4) Lenin's views evolved even while lacking a theoretical foundation for that evolution (until 1914).

The Kautskian Party

Lenin, like almost all leaders of the Russian party, was a committed follower of Karl Kautsky, the German "pope of Marxism". Hence he refused to support Rosa Luxemburg's criticism of Kautsky within the German Social Democratic Party, or to believe in Kautsky's betrayal in 1914, when Kautsky supported German imperialism in World War I. Lenin insisted the newspaper copy that reported Kautsky's stand was a forgery. This commitment made it impossible for Lenin to recognize the merits of Luxemburg's critique of social democracy. His confidence in Kautsky's revolutionary credentials was bolstered by the fact that Kautsky supported Lenin's theoretical views against the Mensheviks on the source of the revolution to come in Russia. Kautsky, too, thought it would be a bourgeois revolution

carried out by workers and peasants independent of the capitalists. (Collected Works, Vol. 10, p. 359) For Lenin, the party of Kautsky and Bebel was a revolutionary workers party. He could hardly have felt this way and rejected Kautsky's party model (for Lenin that could only have meant open criticism). That this is not mere conjecture is easily demonstrated.

Kautsky, like Marx and Engels, believed in a party which embraced (in principle) the whole class. A full quarter of all the votes for the German SDP came from party members. It was a party which included a wide range of views, reformist and revolutionary (like the American Kautskian party, the Socialist Party USA, with its own heroic Bebel in the person of Eugene Debs.) This model remains the organizational principle, advocated in the US today by parts of Democratic Socialists of America. The problem of working class socialist reformism was never fully faced up to by Kautsky or the founding fathers of the socialist movement. Believing as he did in the theory, of immiseration of the working class under capitalism, Kautsky saw the working class as fairly uniformly (though not in its entirety) moving to socialist revolution under the party's leadership. The resulting mass movement, he believed, would curb and even save most reformist-tending individuals and groups. (Cliff, p. 278) The widely shared theory of capitalism's inevitable collapse contributed to this variant of "revolutionary optimism."

Kautsky believed that the party intellectuals' role was to bring socialist theory and consciousness to workers. Alone, the workers were capable only of trade union consciousness. Finally, the SDP was seen as a vanguard, like any party, in the sense that it represented a class or fraction of one. The party was the stratum which by inclination separated out and organized an ideology and strategy, i.e., did the political work of the class for it. (Even DSA is a vanguard of sorts, though a vanguard sect!) The SDP was a vanguard, to Lenin also, by virtue of the fact that it, too, was an expression of the unevenness of workers' consciousness and commitment.

Lenin as a Kautskian

Until 1914, Lenin, too, believed in the party of the class as a whole. Consequently, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, and Lenin, constantly fought for a united party which included both revolutionists and reformists. The Bolsheviks' insistence that they were just a faction was no fiction. Lenin and Plekhanov also shared the Kautskian doctrine which, they thought, ensured the victory of the revolutionary current in the party: both accepted the immiseration thesis and believed that rejection of this thesis would inevitably lead to reformism and opportunism. (See 1903 Congress Minutes and Collected Works, Vol. 18, p. 435-6). It is not surprising that Lenin, holding this view believed that the intellectuals were the source of reformism in the party. The task was then to curb them, and use them—for Lenin shared, at least in 1902, Kautsky's view of the positive aspects of the intellectuals as well.

Of course, to say the Russians were Kautskians is just a start. For Lenin, and many Mensheviks too, at least for a time, the Kautskian model had to be adapted for the repressive regime and the illegal conditions of work. Kautsky certainly approved such adaptations of his the-

ory, in principle.

What adaptations? Lenin's first try was expressed in the Bolshevik faction model in effect between 1902-05. In the name of security, the party in practice seldom worked on the electoral principle. It was the time of the committeeman. Activists, leaders, entire committees were coopted from above. Workers were, in practice, not encouraged to be part of the cadre of full-time professional revolutionaries. In short, Lenin advocated a highly elitist, unabashedly military model which aroused the opposition of Kautsky, Luxemburg, and Trotsky, not to speak of the Mensheviks.

But Lenin's adaptations were adaptations, nevertheless, and not a break with the democratic elitist party of Kautsky. So it is not surprising that Lenin continued through all this to try to build a united party with those who opposed his organizational and political views. And when Lenin balked at times, tactically, he was often overruled by his organization. The Lenin of 1902 was then not a vanguardist in the sense we know today. If his organization bore a resemblance to one, it was on tactical, empirical grounds with no political rationale (as yet).

1905

Underground organization, like guerrilla warfare, contains inherently severe risks for any non-putschist group, especially one that sees the working class as a forger of its own future. For clandestinity tends to make a movement narrow and rigid in comparison to an open party. An underground party cannot be broadly based (though a support movement may). And indeed, the party even comes under great pressure to limit rank and file initiative for fear of the unanticipated effects on the entire organization. Similarly, the unavoidable centralism creates an immense tension with a mass movement with its own dynamic. (Nevertheless, there was, and is, a powerful tendency among many "Leninists" to make a virtue of necessity, imposing the Russian underground norms on the Russia of 1905, not to speak of the U.S. today.)

How much these dangers are avoidable, and how much Lenin's organizational practices contributed to intensifying these dangers, is another subject. But for whatever reason, Lenin's organization, the organization he built, was a radical failure when put to the test in 1905. (Though the Bolsheviks were saved from the worst consequences in the long run by their revolutionary Jacobin determination, and by the even worse political and organizational failures of their rivals, the Mensheviks.) The Bolsheviks had a sectarian abstentionist line to the mass unions organized by Zubatov (a police agent). The Bolshevik committeemen, sure that they and the party alone could lead and the masses could only follow, opposed the central expression of the 1905 revolution—the soviet. They told it—take our program and leadership, or else . . . They were promptly and properly isolated. It was Trotsky, their revolutionary critic, and not a Bolshevik, who became the leader of the soviet. The same elements in the Bolshevik faction bitterly resisted any democratization of the party or recruitment of workers. Chickens come home to roost. (Parallel dogmatic errors were to occur in 1917 prior to Lenin's return to Russia.) It took all of Lenin's authority

to force a change in these politics, but it was belated, and only after a bitter struggle.

As society approached a more democratic climate, i.e., one in which the Czarist state could not arbitrarily exercise its repressive intents, another Lenin appeared. Instead of a working class limited to union consciousness, Lenin now spoke of a working class with instinctive socialist strivings; the spontaneous (i.e., independent of any party) self-mobilization of the masses was recognized. Now the committeeman model was no longer "indispensable" but was counter-productive. The party was now to be made of 99% workers who could hardly be professional revolutionists, and yet had to be able, and were able, to make policy. (See below, and Cliff, Lieberman p. 31-2.) How much this was a "correction" leading to a more interdependent, mutually fertilizing relation of party to class, and how much was just recognition of the new possibilities implicit in an open political situation is difficult to say.

But the events of 1906 do tell us for the first time what Lenin's views of a party under normal, legal or semi-legal conditions were, at that time. For early 1906, a brief moment of Czarist democracy, was the setting of a congress of the RSDLP. At this convention, when the party had 135,000 members, the term democratic centralism made its first appearance. The need for centralism (the extent depending on the degree of illegality and the state of struggle) was then not questioned by anyone, including the Mensheviks (a majority at this congress). What is forgotten however is the context and meaning of the term at that time. The term in fact embodied a criticism of Lenin. He had been under sharp attack for excessive centralism bordering on authoritarianism. The term, democratic centralism, was born then as a corrective of Lenin, as seen by the majority. (Lenin himself may not have seen it that way, but as a new form for new circumstances. In fact the near unanimous resolution was incorporated in the minutes at Lenin's request.)

The focus of the resolution was on democratic centralism. Concretely, what did this concept mean then? First, it continued the Kautskian perspective of a united multi-tendency party (reformist and revolutionary); the principle of elected officials and committees, not appointed from the center; the principle of recall of all elected officers. (Collected Works, Vol. 10, p. 376) In addition, Lenin recognized the need to involve the ranks in decision making over and beyond party conventions. This took the form of approving and carrying out membership referenda on policy (Collected Works, Vol. 11, p. 434-8); the rights of factions and tendencies to publish their own material and the obligation of the party leadership to circulate these publications; recognition of the importance of local initiatives and self-government; the impermissibility of executive bodies imposing "self-discipline" so that differences among them could be kept from the ranks. (Indeed, in any party with deep roots among the masses, neither leadership opinions nor "for-members-only" opinions can be withheld from the public (not to speak of the FBI) in practice (if only because it is impossible), but must be out in the open (security apart). (Vol. 13, p. 159, Cliff p. 269)) Finally, Lenin supported the right of party members to criticize party policy and analyses in the party's public press and

at public meetings. (Vol. 10, p. 442-3) This was in no way inconsistent with "unity in action," for critiques had to be suspended when a definite action was in process. (So much for that parody which passes for Leninism today.)

With one vital exception (below), this was the model of the Leninist party (within the limits of changing degrees of legality), which governed the actual practice of the Bolshevik party by 1917. It prevailed even through the hectic revolutionary period which (at first "Leninist" blush) one would think could have justified a far more "centralist," from the top down, mode of operation.

The 1906 unity was short-lived. As the political situation in the country deteriorated and repression gained the upper hand, the political differences within the united organization sharpened. Ultra-left and opportunist currents grew. The unity of the Bolshevik faction itself was broken by the emergence of a current against participation in elections to the Duma. In fact, at the 1907 Congress, Lenin was a minority in his faction on this issue and the vote to participate in the elections was only carried by his alliance with the Mensheviks against his own group. At the same time, among the Mensheviks, a tendency toward closer collaboration with the bourgeois liberals brought more and more members to reject the need for an illegal party (or the need for any revolutionary party on the immediate agenda). These were the "liquidationists." The centrifugal forces were so great that the factions soon fell into their quasi-independent mode of activity.

In this situation, a small group headed by Trotsky (and backed by Kautsky) tried to conciliate and breach the growing chasm. Lenin's problem was that however clearly he saw the differences between the groups, he was also still prisoner of the Kautskian model of a party of the class as a whole. As a result it was difficult to retain a principled objection to unity. Consequently, in January 1910 a (last) attempt was made. The two principal factions agreed to dissolve, surrender their funds and property, and jointly condemned both the ultra-lefts and the opportunist liquidators. Participation in parliamentary elections (and other legal opportunities) was confirmed, as was the need for an illegal party. All other differences remained unresolved, but acceptable. Hence there was room for Plekhanov who was, theoretically, the most right-wing pro-bourgeois leader in the party (but was for maintaining an illegal party). In short, there was still no Leninist vanguard party.

The truce lasted for a matter of weeks. All are agreed that the Mensheviks broke it and that was the end. From this point on, Lenin never agreed to unity talks. Instead, he forged a de-facto non-principled (not unprincipled) exclusively revolutionary organization. He still did not justify the break primarily on political grounds (the need for an unambiguously revolutionary vanguard organization which would exclude reformists) but on the organizational ground that Mensheviks were not to be trusted to keep their word—that they were incapable of breaking with the liquidationist wing of their group (which represented the real logic of Menshevik politics).

Out of the Kautskian Shell

But Lenin was still not a "Leninist." From 1910 to 1914 his organizational independence from the Men-

sheviks remained based chiefly on organization, not principled grounds. For he still believed that intellectuals were the real source of opportunism and reformism. The theory of immiseration seemed to support the thesis that reformism was not a problem of the working class itself. (England was the great exception.)

It took Kautsky's 1914 betrayal to destroy this framework essential to revolutionary Kautskian doctrine, both politically and organizationally. For the first time Lenin had to face the fact that reformism is more than a matter of intellectuals and party bureaucrats. He found an explanation in his theory of monopoly capital, imperialism, and the presumed existence of a labor aristocracy. As this became clear to him, the theoretical basis was laid for Lenin to emerge from his Kautskian shell both politically and organizationally, and break with the Mensheviks of all varieties and nationalities on principle. The theoretical basis was now laid for two (or more) parties of the working class—basically its reformist and revolutionary wings. One of them was the "true" vanguard of the workers revolution.

And that is "all" the Leninist vanguard theory is—the need for a party, but a party of the revolutionary wing of the workers movement. There was no prejudgment of the vanguard's being inherently a minority of the workers; the Bolsheviks were a majority of the workers movement by 1912. Even in a non-revolutionary period, the revolutionary wing can be the majority. (But in the event of being a minority, the United Front tactic becomes the central corollary for work.) Nor is this vanguard defined as monolithic, "only" revolutionary.

But is that "all?" Yes, with the addition that since form follows function, a revolutionary party is naturally organized along different lines than a reformist electoral party. It is necessarily more democratic than a social democratic party, and, because it is more democratic, it is, can be, openly, unabashedly, "disciplined," i.e. it respects real majority rule in action. (Whereas a social democratic organization—like a bourgeois party—can and normally does vote one policy "democratically" at a congress, while the leadership acts another way in practice.) Beyond these elementary corollaries, the actual organizational content and norms of the revolutionary party will vary with the situation, national peculiarities, the stage of development of the revolutionary organization, and the level of class struggle.

We cannot here review the many stages and phases of Lenin's organizational practice. But we can look briefly at the organizational norms followed by Lenin at times which are most like our own, i.e., in 1906 and 1917 when the party was legal, and the working class in motion. When one does so, doubts tend to evaporate. In 1906, the party norms he supported included the use of referenda, the right of minorities to publish and openly differ with the "party line," etc.) As for 1917, that situation is more widely appreciated. All party differences, and there were many, were openly debated in the public press. Party congresses to set policy were held every few months (even though in a revolutionary period, in a rapidly changing scene, one could easily have expected an argument for fewer meetings). Going to the ranks over the head of the leadership was almost a norm.

But if a revolutionary party not only need not, but must not be monolithic, then the door opens to a viable, principled, regrouped revolutionary movement.

Revolutionary Democracy

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Strange as it may seem to some, a revolutionary socialist organization must by its very nature, i.e. by virtue of its tasks and goals, be the most democratic organization conceivable (even more so than the fabled soviet democracy of 1917). This is in marked fundamental opposition to the character of social democratic, electoralist organizations which by their very nature cannot be democratic in more than form. (They can also lack discipline, as we know very well.) A party geared primarily to accomplishing its goals through elections does not need, or usually want, an activist cadre, except at election time, and perhaps not even then, given the role of TV, etc. (In the Democratic Party, successful candidates often have their own machinery and cadre to which the party cadres are subordinate.) The life of an electoralist party is dominated by routine, a passive membership which is, therefore, inevitably, relatively uninformed. "Informed" decision-making is done by the party apparatus (or an outside parallel apparatus in the U.S.), irrespective of party platforms. The structure is therefore organically elitist, substitutionist and independent of the members no matter how democratic the organization may be, or appear to be, formally.

By contrast, a revolutionary workers organization, despite its need for "undemocratic" discipline, in fact requires the most profound party democracy if its goal is really workers power, and not some agency or group ruling for workers, in "their interest." For workers power, a party needs above all the ability to relate to the spontaneous outbursts of the masses. It needs the feedback which only an independent, educated rank and file can bring to the party to correct the inevitable errors—errors compounded by the fact that the apparatus leadership is inevitably to some degree isolated from reality. It is this relation of party and class, this reciprocal interaction between the masses and their party(s), which is the key to revolutionary politics. This means that the party ranks have to be, or aim to become, what Gramsci spoke of as "organic intellectuals," workers who overcome the division between manual and mental labor. Aiding this metamorphosis is a central task of revolutionary leadership. For without such a cadre, democratic control of the party and revolution by the working class, not "for" it, are in fact impossible. Without such cadre, no leadership group or party can play its part in the revolutionary process.

In one sense, Stalinism can be traced to the defeat and physical destruction and/or demoralization of part of this all-important stratum of the party in the gruesome period of the civil war, and the absorption of most of the rest into the bureaucratic state apparatus. (Later this was compounded by the conscious dilution of the party through the sudden, factional admission of several hundred thousand people with relatively low level of awareness, much less commitment.)

The need for party democracy has equally deep roots of a prefigurative character. The object of the revolution is to pass from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom. The very existence or coming into existence of a revolutionary party, whose consciousness transcends

the present and links us all to the future world of freedom, is a fragmentary anticipation of that world. In a parallel way, individual relations and relations of the party as a whole to individual members, have to consciously strive to make the process of decision-making today pre-figure, as much as possible, those we want to build under socialism. For comradeship in politics is a special case of true friendship no less intense, binding or encompassing. In this sense, then, the forging of a real party cadre on a mass scale (and a non-mass revolutionary party is inconceivable in the U.S.) is one facet of the creation within the working class, under capitalism, of the working class to come before it dissolves itself into "society at large."

It goes without saying that the forms through which these conceptions are expressed will vary with the circumstances, history, tradition, stage of the class struggle and state of the socialist movement. Nevertheless, there must be express organizational norms before the departures necessitated by circumstances can be considered or justified.

ORGANIZATIONAL NORMS AND PRINCIPLES that follow from the necessary democratic character of a revolutionary working class organization:

1) A cadre organization: an organization of non-activist, mere dues-payers cannot be democratic.

2) Right of tendencies to form and maintain themselves at all times. The socialist organization operates on the democratic principle that self-correction will be a continuing necessity. This means that a healthy respect for minorities is seen as a guarantor of the party's future ability to correct its errors. It means, too, the awareness that every majority starts out as a minority.

3) Right of women, gays, Blacks, Hispanics to organize caucuses within the party. These caucuses are quite distinct from the Women's Commissions (and others) which organize the party's work among various milieus. They exist to develop the individuals, their self-confidence, and to defend the rights of women (et al) inside the organization.

4) Guarantee of at least proportional representation to all political minorities (who declare themselves) on all national bodies.

5) Guarantee of gender and people of color representation on all bodies.

6) The discussion bulletins of the organization shall be available to the interested public and open to all viewpoints within the party at all times.

7) Right to publicly differ with the views of the party majority shall not be infringed upon.

8) Maximum involvement of membership in decision making. Modern communication technology makes such involvement easier even on a national scale; referenda can be considered as a means of determining policy; policy should be set in the branches by the membership, not by executive, administrative bodies.

9) Relation of the party ranks to the leadership: a democratic organization does not obviate the need for a role for leadership within an organization. Good leadership is an asset no organization can dispense with. But leadership carries its problems and dangers as well. The party leadership inevitably tends toward a bureaucratic apparatus mode of functioning. It is an apparatus with routinist, often conservative, tendencies, influenced by

the prevalent legalism and by its own needs. It is often a technical elite of editors, publicists, organizers with their own fragmenting division of labor, as a result of which they tend to be isolated from the mass movement and have a connection with it only through the party cadre within the movements. The leadership, often more theoretically advanced than the ranks, simultaneously suffers from the disadvantage of theory—a tendency to rigidity and inflexibility in the face of concrete reality. This rigidity is compounded in small organizations by the fact that at some point, often a prolonged period of time, it may be necessary to defend a minoritarian and usually untestable theory.

The Bolshevik party leadership gave repeated examples of these tendencies in situations of the gravest importance. In 1905, as we know, Lenin's apparatus cadre missed the significance of the soviets. In 1917, the leadership advised against the women's strike which precipitated the February revolution. And when the revolution broke out over their heads, they resisted deepening the revolutionary process (because their theory that the revolution would be a bourgeois revolution set limits to the tasks they set for themselves, initially). It took Lenin's mobilization of the party ranks against the leadership to reverse these policies.

Some of the organizational means of combating the above would be: (a) the minutes of all meetings of all bodies should be available to all members. The minutes should include a record of the votes of all members of those bodies. A climate must exist in which the members of all bodies recognize their primary responsibility is not to the committee, but to the membership. (b) The weight of full-time functionaries on leading bodies should be minimized. (c) Consideration should be given to means for insuring a rotation of tasks and a rotation in and out of the party apparatus, for the good of the party and the individuals.

10) If democracy points to the importance of minority rights for the safety and health of the entire party, democracy also, of course, addresses the question of majority rights. Majority rights imply more than just the majority's right to carry out its policy. In a movement which is engaged in action, not just deliberation or legislation, and not just a discussion club, the question inevitably arises when and how the majority may insist that the minority carry out the will of the majority. Forgotten sometimes is the fact that the majority's ability to carry out its policy often, normally, requires minority acquiescence in practice. If the minority is to expect its rights and concerns to be respected, it must recognize the right of the majority to implement its policy and not be obstructed in its course. (It goes without saying that we are referring here to actions, not policies or views, though of course the distinction between the two is not always easy to demarcate, just as the administration of policy often ends up in practice in the making of policy.)

The traditional formulation of "majority rights" is usually cast in terms of "discipline." Discipline, i.e., the support of the majority in actions, is, however, impossible to realize unless the cadre's, i.e. the membership's, training and life is democratic in the sense delineated above. Discipline is only attainable if it is internal, self-imposed, if the members agree (not just submit) to be

disciplined—an agreement which will come if minorities feel that the organization's structure is such as to allow them to become a majority; if the minority has sufficient confidence in and regard for the organization's membership and leaders; if they feel these feelings are reciprocated, and if they are confident that they have genuine input into making the decision or into reversing them, i.e., if genuinely free discussion exists at every moment till the actual moment of action.

But even majority rights "in actions" are limited, hardly an absolute. For one, a wise majority will not always insist upon its rights. For example, if it is a "mere" majority. Similarly, there will be times when minorities will and should be allowed to act as they perceive necessary. For example, there were differences among us in Workers Power on whether to participate in the Citizens Party. One can imagine a minority, at least for a time, being allowed to relate (or not to relate) to the Citizens Party without producing a crisis in the organization. Or, we are reminded by Myra Weiss, a former leader of the SWP, that in 1946 (to take one case of importance), the SWP in Los Angeles was responsible for getting the L.A. labor movement to stop the fascist, Gerald K. Smith. A minority of the party felt that the strategy would fail, and insisted on another course—organizing a united front of the left and progressives. The minority acted on its views, and its action was not "viewed with alarm," nor did it provoke any crisis.

Apart from "discipline" there is a second expression of the unique feature of a revolutionary socialist organization which leads socialists to conceive of their party as an army. We are all well aware of the care with which analogies must be treated—the ease with which they can imperceptibly change from analogies to identities. In this case, the analogy has in the past often provided the rationale for many anti-democratic practices, all in the name of the fact that we are conducting a class war, and that we are a party of action, not talk. But the possible misuse of a conception does not alone justify disposing of it. It merely suggests that we must proceed with caution, keeping in mind the limits of analogies.

In one sense, of course, our revolutionary goals make the army analogy credible. But it cannot be forgotten that the army we speak of is unique—a democratic army, an army more democratic than civilian society.

Secondly, there are various moments in the life of any army—peace time and war. This applies to our "democratic army" as well. After all, the class struggle passes through different stages, ranging from the "war of maneuver" to a "war of position," from that slogging day-to-day struggle in which socialists and workers try to attain hegemony in society, to those other moments in which the struggle reaches a moment of crisis. Today, we are trying to lay the basis (it would be delusional to think we are or can be doing more) for organization in which the movement is waging, for the most part, a war of position (skirmishes might be closer to reality) and not yet a war of maneuver.

The army analogy has still another implicit consequence, a regrettable one. In its name are justified relations among comrades which are in fact devoid of comradeship and often even simple human considerations. The "tough" army analogy only reinforces the competitive, manipulative relations inherent in capital-

ism which are compounded by patriarchal male-female relations. Consequently, relations and methods of work and discussion within the socialist organization have all too often been hierarchical, characterized by fiercely polemical exchanges, a reluctance to give comrades the benefit of the doubt—all of which can be personally very destructive.

Democracy and the Law of Diminishing Size

The revolutionary left has, as we all know, exhibited a suicidal tendency to split. Some of the reasons are understandable. A small group is constantly faced with the pressures from the "narcissism of small differences." Lacking the gravitational centripetal force of a large party, with ties to the working class which cannot be easily reconstructed or severed, lacking this cement, differences which all too often cannot be tested in action, differences which are tactical in nature, not to speak of personality conflicts and ambition (which are especially devastating for small groups), all combine to exert enormous pressures for splits. After all, we are told, the resulting groups are seldom qualitatively smaller, so "what difference does it make," especially since the promised gains-to-come are not just the advantage of a "purer" more "correct" line, but the alleged certainty of a real "breakthrough" on the basis of that correct line.

But these pressures, these psychologically powerful reasons, have been perversely compounded by a practice of our own making, a practice which (in the name of Leninism) justified authoritarian, monolithic, anti-democratic policies and practices which encouraged and accelerated the all too real centrifugal tendencies. The net result of all these has been that the left is characterized by a seeming law of diminishing size. Divide and multiply seems to be the rule, and in the process revolutionary left propaganda groups have passed over into irrelevant monolithic sects.

The rejection of this model of socialist organization and its replacement by a conception of a genuinely democratic revolutionary organization along lines such as those above is an indispensable precondition for a stable, united organization. It would permit us to project a regrouped revolutionary current in the U.S., which will have the capacity to integrate with and cross-fertilize with workers' political formations of an embryonically revolutionary character (which would even characterize a Labor Party under certain conditions). The potential for playing such a role depends on the degree to which such an organization can develop at least some of the theory needed for an American revolution, and, inseparable from that very possibility, build rudimentary organic ties to the working class through intervention in its daily struggles. Even for this modest task, a regrouped socialist organization is indispensable.

On the other hand, rejection of a democratic model of a socialist organization has actually had demonstrable reactionary consequences. The recent history of the SWP is only the latest case in point. Its blindness to the problems of Third World revolutions and its uncritical stance toward them is undoubtedly related to the SWP's own bureaucratic conceptions of a socialist organization. ■