

# Short Review

## Community or Class Struggle?

*Community or Class Struggle?*, edited by John Cowley, Adah Kaye, Marjorie Mayo and Mike Thompson. Stage 1, 1977, London.

In capitalist society, dominated by the "primacy of production," Marxist analysis and organizing have traditionally been centered around the workplace while ignoring issues of struggle that occur in the homes and communities of the working class. *Community or Class Struggle?*, a collection of essays by various community activists and Marxist theoreticians, is an attempt to generate discussion in order to correct this imbalance.

The book is divided into four sections, with valuable introductions to each by the editors. The first section concerns itself with the social reproduction of labor -- not just Numbers of workers, but the ideological, political and social forces that create a well-disciplined and manageable working class. Manuel Castells, in his essay "The Class Struggle and Urban Contradictions," points this out: "The productive machine has become so complex and the interdependencies so intense, that production cannot tolerate intrusion from a way of life outside working hours which is not very carefully regulated" (p. 42). The two opening essays by Andre Gorz and by Castells discuss these issues from the basis that the development of the capitalist mode of production increasingly requires the manipulation and regulation of labor (through the medium of the home and the community) to extend its own reproduction. Contradictions arise outside of the primary level of production as various needs for the reproduction of the working class cannot be met through a market economy (housing, the most visible example of this, is discussed in detail in Section III). Castells' essay examines the possibilities of the politicization of the working class in response to these contradictions. The two selections by Marjaleena Repo open up the question of organizing class struggle in working class communities. Particularly interesting is "Organizing 'the poor' -- against the working class" which contrasts middle-class misconceptions of "community organizing" with a working class strategy of extending the class struggle from the factory to the home.

Section II ("State Employees, Professionals and Radicalization") deals with State-sponsored institutions and structures, such as social work and planning, that have developed to regulate the social reproduction of labor. It is argued that the role and importance of the State has vastly expanded, evidenced by State intrusion into the domain of goods and services that were

formerly produced and distributed through the "free" market -- housing, welfare, social services, education, etc. The debate is centered around the reformist versus radical potential of State employees in these fields. The conclusions here are mixed and not well-defined, primarily due to the fact that the authors recognize the high degree of "co-optability," both subtle and overt, that the State possesses.

Based on this foregoing development of theoretical principles the next two sections concern themselves with an analysis of concrete issues -- Section III with housing, and Section IV with "The Politics and Practice of Community Organizing." In this last section, the political reality and class nature of community organizing is expounded -- the need for liberation (particularly ideological) both at the factory and the home: "The task is to change the realities that tie people in a myriad of ways to the capitalist order: to change people's thinking about health, education and housing and to develop the politics of each through concrete struggles and projects which begin to break down the division of social realities that separate or bind people" (p. 185). The essays in this final section examine and undergo self-criticism of what the authors describe as "experimental politics" -- the effects and policy of a claimants' union in North London; the strategy of building a Marxist revolutionary organization that incorporates community groups. John Cowley, in his essay "The Politics of Community Organizing," advocates, and illustrates with experience, the idea of "community workshops" as a foundation for a pre-party political organization (shades of the soviets).

This book is written by British authors and is based on situations and events that have occurred in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, the theoretical principles illuminated here are manifest in the development of the social reproduction of labor throughout the advanced capitalist countries -- namely that home and community life, though ultimately determined by the productive mode, do not follow blindly in the footsteps of production. Contradictions, inconsistencies and the dialectic are found in the home and community as well as the factory, and herein lies potential for organization and struggle. It must be understood that the distinction between work and living, between factory and home, is a false one, engendered by capitalist ideology. Under advanced capitalism the community has increasingly become vital for the capitalist mode of production in regard to the reproduction of labor (housing, health, education, etc.), a focus of ideology (TV, movies, newspapers, etc.), and a base for political action. In this manner it can be seen that the struggle against capitalism has thus far been a two-front battle. In order to increase the consciousness of the working class this dichotomy must be fused into a unified whole. This concept is well stated by Irene Binns in her essay "What Are We, Trying To Achieve through

Community Action": "No issue is necessarily too small, local or 'reformist' to help build a class consciousness, but we do need to be able to generalize from such small scale conflicts to see them in the context of the wider society, if they are not to be inward-looking and parochial. We need to link them together.... We also need to link them to the wider struggle of the working class, in the industrial field for this is where the strength of the working class lies" (p. 111).

Don Parson

*Continued from page 26*

best piece he'd seen on revisionism in the CP. We are relying heavily upon the T.R. for our theoretical development out here in the ocean.

WE EAGERLY AWAIT MORE ISSUES; KEEP 'EM COMING!

Modern Times Bookstore  
Honolulu, Hawaii

*Due to a number of problems, the conclusion to the article on "The Partisan Experience," which appeared in Theoretical Review #13, was printed in an abbreviated and garbled form. What follows is the complete text of that conclusion.*

## V. CONCLUSION

How could it happen? How could Partisan, having transformed itself into an organization moving off of a basically sound, if somewhat sketchy, set of Marxist-Leninist political principles, have suddenly committed hari-kari en masse? There certainly were fortuitous circumstances which immediately brought about the demise of the Partisan Organization: a strong counter-revolutionary "Maoist" organization eager to swallow up any burgeoning Marxist-Leninist opposition; a leader whose complete dominance was threatened by his political errors, who was not averse to using deception to maintain his career and who in any case was not politically competent to evaluate the competing organization; a complaisant leading body even politically less competent than the leader, always ready to follow his leadership in order to maintain their own positions. But while these essentially external factors were undoubtedly important *conditions* for the change, we know that we must look to internal factors for the cause, the *basis*, of the change.

As pointed out in Section II, during the summer of 1972, Partisan had transformed itself into a Marxist-Leninist organization in form only, not in content. With the exception of Paterson, way off in Toronto, neither the leadership nor the rest of the membership had any real understanding of Marxist-Leninist political theory; worse yet, they knew enough about Marxism-Leninism to delude themselves that they understood it well and had only to apply what they did know in order to carry out successful practice. The "Statement of Direction" of August 20 was a reasonable start for such an

organization, but it contained errors and omissions and in any case was not internalized by the membership. For example, Partisan did not yet understand the relationship between the proletariat and the vanguard Party (or pre-Party formation), considering the Party to emerge from the proletariat as its "conscious, tested leadership"; this economist error ("workerism") was ruthlessly exploited by the Central Committee in arguing in favor of joining CPC(M-L) as the revolutionary vanguard which in fact had set itself up independent of the masses and which was (apparently) applying Marxist-Leninist theory throughout its work.

In view of the reactionary role played at the end by most of the Partisan Central Committee, one may ask whether it is not perhaps bad in general for leadership to be so "strong," in the sense of being able to impose its political lines on the whole organization. It is, of course, bad for leadership to impose incorrect political lines on the organization, but the rectification for this is not making leadership structurally weak (e.g., by not allowing leadership to advance its positions in struggle within lower bodies, as was attempted during the struggle to rectify Partisan's political line). In the case of Partisan, it was "strong" leadership which transformed it from a New Left organization to a Marxist-Leninist one. Central leadership, composed of the most theoretically advanced members of the organization, must always have the ability to "impose" correct lines on the organization (normally through protracted struggle, of course); to deny this is to deny the primacy of political theory in determining the practice of the organization. The rectification for a situation in which leadership is "strong" and membership is "weak" is, through systematic study, to raise the theoretical level of membership to the point where they are able to challenge incorrect political lines rather than just passively accepting them.

Without a solid grounding in Marxist-Leninist political theory, the Partisans easily fell prey to CPC(M-L) -- the organization was outwardly Marxist-Leninist, but its members had not yet reached that level. This was the contradiction, between form and content, which caused the demise of Partisan. And while the case of Partisan was extreme, it certainly was not unique. Our movement abounds with Marxist-Leninist organizations with theoretical levels not high enough to prevent their turning into their opposite -- in the U.S., the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) provides one such example. Marxist-Leninist organizations must take special care to raise the theoretical level of all their members, through systematic study of and struggle over the Marxist-Leninist classics and contemporary works. Cadre must become competent to evaluate the political lines coming from leadership, and the organization must function in a way which allows effective struggle against erroneous positions taken by leadership. It is only in this way that a national Marxist-Leninist organization carrying out a correct political line can be built.