

ORGANIZATION & SPONTANEITY

THE THEORY OF THE VANGUARD
PARTY AND ITS APPLICATION TO
THE BLACK MOVEMENT IN THE
U.S. TODAY

KIMATHI MOHAMMED

one of our greatest, if not the greatest, sources of power has gone literally untapped.

That won't do! Women must organize and mobilize themselves like they have done in the past. Although it is seldom mentioned, women were in the forefront of some of the fiercest battles to establish "community control" in many localities during the 1960s. Quite often, however, black politicals overlook the significant role women have played and are capable of playing. The general tendency today is to pay lip service to the importance of women and to shove the "Woman Question" off on aggressive women to deal with. But not only are women capable of providing leadership on the "Woman's Question", they are also very capable of providing leadership on all other political concerns.

Today, more than ever before, it is necessary to unleash those revolutionary energies which have been diverted and suppressed by capitalist society. Through the process of revolutionary struggle, those elements which form the movement below will organize themselves in quite unimaginable ways, to ensure the successful development of a new social order. Our task, therefore, is to discover ways to unleash the creativity and revolutionary energies of the black masses. But that is not a task for a small band of men and women to undertake by themselves. That is a task which can only be accomplished through the collective thought and action of the revolutionary forces which make up the black movement.

itary, educational, and political institutions poses a grave threat to American society. Although black people resemble a captive nation on one hand, they are an integral part of the American body politic on the other hand. That is, the black movement cannot be isolated or contained, whatever happens inside the “Ghetto” spreads rapidly and influences other developments in American society.

By 1976 it is estimated that 55 percent of the total population of about twelve major cities in the United States will be black. This is significant because even though the numerical strength of black people is small in relation to the total population—they are highly concentrated in the urban-industrial areas and are approaching an overwhelming majority. For instance, 60 percent of the inner city population in Detroit is already black. Coupled with this is the fact that the black masses in Detroit form one of the most explosive and revolutionary sections of the “Black Revolution” in America.

The international headquarters of the automobile industry is located in Detroit. In some automobile plants black workers represent more than 70 percent of the work force. This type of information is very, very important in determining our relative strength in relation to the whole process of production in this country. Also, in determining how we must move to effect the changes we seek.

In the coming decades we must call upon black workers to utilize their clout. Throughout the sixties we saw our political strength in terms of racial solidarity. But we seldom saw the importance of black unity in respect to our relation to the productive forces of society. That is, black political leadership did not call upon workers to take positive action at the point of production. Such a step could have given us a decisive edge in certain battles around issues of community control.

Not too long ago longshoremen were asked to refuse to unload shipments of chrome from Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) in protest to the super-exploitation of blacks by a small white regime. In Baltimore and New Orleans longshoremen also responded to such a request in a very positive manner. They did not unload the chrome or any subsequent shipments from Zimbabwe. That only goes to show us the level of consciousness of certain elements of the working class.

Now, it is quite obvious that black women as an organized segment of the population are a very powerful and conscious force. However, no serious effort has been made to unleash the revolutionary energies of women. Usually black women are classified as “supportive” elements and thrown into political cadres which stifle the political development and creativity of women. Consequently,

To Mzee C.L.R. James
and the revolutionary youths he has inspired and coached...

To Mzee Roy S. Turner
August 26, 1915–April 4, 1974

“We must struggle from one generation to the next”

avowed socialist and Marxist, for president. The election of Allende represented something new in the development of the world. Never before had an avowed socialist come to power through the electoral process.

The violent overthrow of Allende's regime is only another example of how far the capitalists will go to save themselves. Although a military junta executed the coup, everyone knows that it was planned by the United States' State Department and financed by American capital. Unfortunately, the Chilean masses were not sufficiently armed to defend their revolution. However, through the defeat of the Chilean workers and peasants we have learned many lessons.

The most important lesson we have learned is that a revolution is helpless unless the mass of the population is sufficiently armed with both military and ideological weapons. For while the revolution is in progress, the counter-revolution is also in progress. But the counter-revolution cannot succeed in the face of the spontaneous upsurge of the mass of the population whenever the masses are adequately equipped to protect their revolution and they don't have the fetters of state bureaucracy upon their shoulders.

When the United States attacked Cuba in 1961 (the Bay of Pigs episode) Fidel Castro had to call upon the peasants and workers to defend the Cuban Revolution. When the Portuguese launched an invasion against Guinea in November 1970, President Sekou Toure had to arm as many workers and peasants as he could and call upon the total population to defend the sovereignty of Guinea. These are just two incidents in which we see spontaneity being applied to a given situation.

New universal-historical facts have shown, with no uncertainty, that spontaneity is absolutely necessary to bring about fundamental changes in our society. Black politicals, therefore, must grab this new universal conception and apply it in a scientific way to the problems, given the peculiar entanglement of the black masses in the net of international capitalism. However, those problems have to be faced with sober senses to avoid panic and disintegration inside the black movement.

That is exactly what the black movement is confronted with now—panic and disintegration. Of course, there are some objective reasons for this; and one has to always expect these things. But the degree of panic and disintegration taking place is an "abnormal" development when we look at the revolutionary potential of the black masses. Particularly, when we look at it in light of the strategic position black people occupy in the cogwheel of American capital.

The degree to which black people have been integrated into industrial, mil-

The language of the average black person is also usually void of mystical notions of “blackness”. However, a great deal of mysticism has filtered down from black middle class “cultural nationalists” to the movement below. Therefore, an effort has to be made to put “blackness” back into its proper historical context..

“Blackness” is a political banner which the black masses will always rally around when it’s necessary to do so. Outside of the framework of revolutionary struggle, “blackness” has no meaning. It’s like “a pitcher before an empty fountain.” Or, it’s like an empty well—in which one sees no hope of quenching ones thirst.

Under the disguise of “blackness”, a number of black “militants” have tried to superimpose outdated feudal relations upon the black movement in the United States. Such relations have stifled the political development of black women who are tremendous revolutionary force in this society. Also, under the disguise of “blackness” we have seen ambitious black politicals engage in petty capitalist projects which are designed to maintain the wholesale exploitation of black people. In other words, being “black” cannot be the sole criteria for judgement.

Some black politicals feel that they only have to study the black struggle. But as George Jackson said in *Blood In My Eye*, “Each popular struggle must be analyzed historically to discover new ideas.” A study of revolutionary movements outside the United States will not only broaden our perspective but it will also give us insights on questions related to how we must organize ourselves.

We have to watch every new development in the world body politic. For a tremendous upsurge of oppressed people is taking place and literally wrecking the world market system. International capitalism is, therefore, in a desperate state of crisis. Profits are falling steadily and national economies are collapsing simultaneously. Along with these things has developed a full-scale “Energy Crisis” affecting all industrial countries.

Euro-American capitalists and their agents are running around hopelessly searching for a solution to the crisis and paralysis that is descending upon the social order. The mass of the population needs to know this. But more importantly, they need to know that things like the “Energy Crisis” are insoluble as long as the capitalist mode of production dominates the world body politic. They also need to know that millions of workers and peasants are rising up in direct opposition to the forces of oppression.

“This great humanity has cried enough.” That was evident when the mass of the population in Chile went to the polls and voted for Salvadore Allende, an

Acknowledgement

This pamphlet is not the product of a single Individual, although my name appears on the front cover as the person who wrote it.

Before this pamphlet was printed many politicals reviewed the various drafts and held meetings to resolve many controversial points. After much discussion and the refinement of various points, a consensus was reached among the politicals whose hands this pamphlet went through that it must be published immediately. Subsequently, the political grouping, which operates under the name Marcus Garvey Institute, began making arrangements for its publication.

It is not necessary to list all the people who were directly involved in some aspects of this pamphlet’s publication. However, it would be a grave oversight if the name Ali (Mike Lotson) did not appear here. In fact, Ali must be considered the co-author of this pamphlet.

Modibo Kadalie must be mentioned here too because It was he who took the Initiative to circulate the drafts among politicals and organize sessions to discuss the content of this pamphlet in depth.

Then there was Damali Tiombe who actually spent more time getting this pamphlet in shape for publication than anyone else (including Kimathi Mohammed). She typed and edited one draft after another. She wrestled with various controversial points in the drafts and made sure that politics of this document did not get watered down in the process of collective thought and action. Without her assistance and those who worked along with her this pamphlet would probably still be an unpublished document.

Organization and Spontaneity: Two Propositions

The “organization question” is currently being heatedly debated inside the black movement in the United States. But most debates on organization are usually very limited and narrow in scope; in addition to usually being very one-sided affairs. That is, most of these debates revolve strictly around certain aspects of creating a black political party. Seldom does anyone ever come forward to articulate a position in opposition to the creation of a black political party. Usually the debaters are in total agreement (with the fact) that a black political party is necessary; so they don’t have to argue about that. Instead, they argue over structural-functional problems which plague political parties in general.

Most of the current debates on Organization are nothing more than fruitless academic exercises. They do not take us one step closer to a resolution of the “organizational question”. If anything, these debates have further complicated matters and created more confusion inside the black movement.

Two important considerations are always overlooked in the current debates. First, every revolutionary has had to have a base! Second, the old national form of organization with the “Central Command” dictating and directing every phase of activity has collapsed. These are the two propositions we must start with if we are going to seriously approach the question of organization.

The first proposition settles any bickering about the importance of organization. The second proposition spells out precisely what we must recognize. Together, these propositions take us a step closer to resolving conflicts around the type of organization that must be created to ensure the success of any revolutionary movement. By themselves, however they do not provide us with a sufficient understanding of our dilemma. That is why this document does not stop with the two aforementioned propositions.

Since a great deal of the current theoretical confusion and practical mistakes we are encountering stem from a misapplication of V.I. Lenin’s theory of organization, the first section of this document will be an attempt to put Lenin’s theoretical formulation into its proper historical context. After a discussion of Lenin and the Theory of the Vanguard Party, a discussion of Spontaneity and Organization follows; paving the way for our particular concern here—The Black Movement in the United States.

The last section of this document is entitled What Must Be Done. Nothing more needs to be said about the context of this document; except, it is not an attempt to show that Lenin’s theoretical formulation was incorrect. Like all

politic, for politics is in actuality a highly concentrated form of economics.

While we are systematically ridding ourselves of professionalism, we must simultaneously reorganize our thinking. The reorganization of our political thinking is necessary because it has become too narrow, limited and elitist. Unless we immediately begin to expand our vision, we will constantly find ourselves submerged in cynicism, pessimism and despair.

A feeling of hopelessness and powerlessness has already begun to surface inside the black movement. But that particular feeling can easily be overcome. All we have to do is start at our last high peak—Black Power—and show through analyses the heights we reached. Not only must our analyses show our accomplishments, they must also show our failures and mistakes. If such analyses are properly done, we will have the type of transmission fuel needed to transcend feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness.

Continuous theoretical work will be necessary to keep our motors running well. Theoretical work, however, cannot be carried on in a vacuum. Every effort must be made to take theory out of the world of academics and to integrate it into the day-to-day struggles of the mass of the population where it rightfully belongs. That is, theoretical jargon must be broken down into understandable language and placed before the masses, and the ordinary man and woman must be encouraged to undertake theoretical work not only in cooperation with intellectuals, but also without the influence of any “official” symbols of leadership.

Many people think it is ridiculous to encourage the ordinary man and woman to involve themselves with theoretical problems facing the movement. It is not as ridiculous as it sounds. It may, however, be somewhat idealistic. That is, the ordinary man and woman has so little free time, if any, to pursue in depth studies and to formulate their ideas in writing. Nevertheless, it is they who will bring about a resolution of our theoretical problems.

Normally, intellectuals only pose certain theoretical questions. They do not resolve them except on paper. But even to do that they must be in close contact with the movement below. Furthermore, those intellectuals who have totally integrated themselves into the mass movement have discovered that the ordinary man and woman is also quite capable of posing theoretical questions. The average person, however, does not pose things in the same manner and tone as those who have been thoroughly educated in educational institutions of “official” society. Their language is usually void of most of the sentimental idealism contained in the oral and written presentations of those who have been formally trained in “official” schools of thought.

Claude McKay to write: "If we must die, we will die fighting back."

Black nationalism in America has seldom been expressed in the form of a demand for a separate nation. Instinctively, black people stray away from the nation-state idea; recognizing its obsolescence in light of the domination of international capitalism. Usually black nationalism is an expression of resistance to capitalist exploitation and oppression. That is only natural because the roots of black nationalism are to be found in the very conditions under which black people have participated in the development of American capitalism.

Black middle class leadership, however, has failed to undertake a thorough analysis of the rise of black nationalism in the United States. They see the rise of black nationalism as a psychological phenomena, rather than a logical, historical development. This blindness has led many well-meaning black politicals to the party concept, which has only served to increase their blindness. That is, it has caused them to attach more importance to organization than to spontaneity—to place the interest of organization before the interest of the people.

Throughout the 1960s, black leaders continually defined lack of organization as black people's most serious problem. Today, the cry is still for an independent political party. But what the black movement needs more is a clear and decisive ideological position and a solid theoretical basis. If black leadership has any function, then one of its most important functions is to undertake the new theoretical and practical tasks which the black masses create from it. That is the only way leadership can continuously provide clarity and keep before the mass movement a sense of purpose and direction.

What Must Be Done

It has been the irresponsibility and outright betrayal of black political leadership, which has ushered the black movement into a total state of disarray in the United States. And it is going to take a tremendous amount of time and energy to get the black movement back on its feet again.

Cleaning up the mess which bankrupt black political leaders have created seems almost like an impossible task. But it is a task that must be undertaken with confidence. As we proceed, we must not hesitate to expose the corrupt elements among our ranks.

Our first order of business is to wipe out professionalism. On the contrary, politics is not an activity to be undertaken solely by a small privileged and professional band of men and women. It must encompass the entire world body

revolutionaries, Lenin needed a base. Whether the Russian Revolution could have been completed without the creation of a Party, is a matter to be shelved or pursued outside of the context of revolutionary struggle.

Lenin and the Vanguard Organization (Party)

Around 1902, Lenin formulated and advanced a theory of organization—the theory of the vanguard party.

Lenin was quite explicit about the type of organization that had to be built. First and foremost that organization had to be truly revolutionary. "Lenin wanted a rigid narrow organization, with a highly centralized discipline. He wanted a strict division of labour inside the party, each member being responsible for a job of work with which he mainly concerned himself. The regulation of the party, he demanded, should be equally harsh. Under the regime of Tsarism formal democracy was impossible. He advocated democratic centralism. The Central Committee would be freely elected; whenever possible there would be free discussions, but once a decision had been taken it would have to be obeyed blindly."¹

As far as Lenin was concerned, revolutionaries in Russia were "lagging" behind the spontaneous development of the working class movement. They were failing to undertake the new theoretical and practical tasks which were being created daily by the creative political activity of workers. Lenin believed that ordinary working people were "capable of displaying enormous energy and self-sacrifice in strikes and street battles with the police and troops." He also believed that ordinary men and women were the only ones capable of determining the final outcome of the revolutionary movement—"but the struggle against the political police requires special qualities; it requires professional revolutionaries."²

Lenin's concept of organization originated in Western Europe. The dominant form of political organization there was the political party. After studying carefully the development of the World Revolution and particularly the development of the revolutionary movement in Russia, Lenin took the party concept and boldly asserted that:

1 C.L.R. James, *World Revolution*, 1917–1936 Kraus Reprint, Nendlen/Lichtenstein, 1970. Pp. 48–49.

2 V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done," *Collected Works* Vol. 5, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1916. P. 450.

1. No revolutionary movement can endure without a stable organization of leaders maintaining continuity;
2. That the broader the popular mass drawn spontaneously into the struggle, which forms the basis of the movement and participates in it, the more urgent the need for such an organization, and the more solid the organization must be;
3. That such an organization must consist of people professionally engaged in revolutionary activity;
4. That in an autocratic state, the more we confine the membership of such an organization to people who have been professionally trained to combating the political police, the more difficult it will be to unearth the organization
5. The greater will be the number of people from the working class and from other social classes who will be able to join the movement and perform active work in it.³

Two well known revolutionary personalities, Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky, disagreed strongly with Lenin on the question of organization. They argued for a much broader and loose organizational structure. Rosa Luxemburg, while voicing her opposition said, "The ultra-centralism which Lenin demands seems to us, however, not at all positive and creative, but essentially sterile and comineering. Lenin's concern is essentially the control of the activity of the party and not its fruition, the narrowing and not the development, the harassment and not the unification of the movement."⁴

Rosa Luxemburg attacked Lenin's theory of organization without "sparing the rod". But she was very principled in her attack. One can't help but admire Rosa's ability not only to disagree with Lenin, but to also articulate and defend her position. As she engaged in theoretical and ideological struggle with Lenin over the question of the best form of organization she said: "But the domineering spirit of the ultra centralism advocated by Lenin and his friends is not for them an accidental result of mistaken ideas. Rather, this project is related to Lenin's campaign against opportunism, which is carried through into the smallest detail of the organizational question."⁵

3 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, P. 464.

4 Rosa Luxemburg, *Selected Political Writings*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1971. P. 295.

5 Ibid.

While Malcolm X was affiliated with the Nation of Islam, he stressed the need for a separate black nation. But after Malcolm X left the Nation of Islam and traveled extensively in Africa, Malcolm began to talk about nationalism in terms of the importance of black solidarity. In 1964 he formed the Organization of Afro-American Unity for the specific purpose of advancing the cause of the Afro-American struggle. And, Malcolm began to emphasize the need for black people to resist and struggle against the repressive and exploitative forces of American capitalism more so than he had previously.

Unlike Malcolm X, most black leaders who defined themselves as black nationalists continued to push the idea of forming a separate nation. Limiting or defining black nationalism merely as a demand for a separate black nation only forced black leadership to further concern itself with the creation of some sort of political party. Imamu Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) came forward with a pamphlet entitled, *Strategy and Tactics of a Pan-African Nationalist Party*. In that document Imamu said, "if we are talking about nation, we must talk about party, because a party is finally the only structure able to govern coherently." Not only is Imamu's statement ideologically incorrect, but it presupposes that the vast majority of black people in the United States want to form a separate black nation. And that, definitely, is not reflective of the present attitude of the mass of the black population.

Black people may eventually be forced to embark upon a totally autonomous course of nationhood. At the moment, however, they are struggling to control the communities in which they live, especially those communities in which they are a majority. Each battle that has been fought around issues of "community control" has heightened the consciousness of black people tremendously and sharpened the contradictions. But the level of consciousness and sharpness of contradictions varies in relation to the objective socio-economic conditions and political struggles black people are experiencing in their various communities. That is why the appeal for black nationalism has varied from one community to the next. That is also why the form black nationalism takes will vary from one community to another.

In 1948, Oliver Cox stated in *Caste, Class and Race* that Afro-Americans would never become nationalistic: "The numerical balance of the races will not allow the development of nationalistic antagonism on the part of colored people," Cox said. But Cox was incorrect. Throughout the 1960s black nationalism grew at a phenomenal rate. Racial antagonisms took on a new militant twist, quite similar to the militancy which emerged in 1919 and caused the poet

en them into the pit of the vanguard party theory. It is also the attitude which literally destroyed the momentum of the “Black Power” movement. Once black leaders fell prey to vanguardism they subsequently became a brake of the “Black Revolution”. Instead of trying to discover new ways to unleash the revolutionary energies of the black masses, they began to figure out ways to harness and control these energies.

The creation of an independent black political party became the overriding concern of black leadership. *The Role of the Vanguard Party*, an essay by James and Grace Boggs, reflects the tremendous importance black leaders attached to this idea. “For the Black movement and the Black community the necessity for the rapid development of a party able to give revolutionary leadership to the masses is not an abstract question,” James and Grace wrote. They stated that it was “a matter of the utmost urgency.” And those personalities who considered themselves revolutionary nationalist agreed strongly with James and Grace’s position.

A Manifesto For A Black Revolutionary Party, by James Boggs, is probably one of the most widely circulated pamphlets advancing the vanguard organization theory. Boggs contends that: “without such a party, the masses are without revolutionary leadership, and without revolutionary leadership there is no successful revolution.” Whereas, there is some truth to the latter part of Boggs’ statement, it is totally incorrect to say implicitly that revolutionary leadership only emerges from the creation of a political party. Historically, revolutionary leadership has emerged from the lowest depths of mass movement itself. Two of the most widely read revolutionary theoreticians and practitioners—Malcolm X and George Jackson—emerged out of the struggle below. Both of them were primarily self-educated men who spent a great deal of time in prison. In fact, George Jackson never left prison after he was sent there. Like Malcolm, he was murdered, except Malcolm was killed on the outside and George on the inside.

Before the life was snuffed out of the fiery EI-Hajj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X), he had been like a “voice crying in the wilderness” preparing both black leadership and the black masses for the events we witnessed during Black Power’s heyday. In his “Message to the Grassroots,” Malcolm brought back the dynamism of black nationalism which had disappeared with the decline of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and its charismatic leader Marcus Garvey. Malcolm told his audience, “A revolutionary is a black nationalist...If you’re afraid of black nationalism you’re afraid of revolution. And, if you love revolution, you love black nationalism.”

Rosa was absolutely correct when she pointed out that Lenin’s struggle against opportunism was interwoven into his theory of organization. Whether history has proven her entirely correct on the organizational question in relation to the particular revolutionary movement in Russia is another matter. All we know is that some of Rosa’s fears and also Leon Trotsky’s were very legitimate. We will not, however, get into whether they were more correct than Lenin or vice versa. To do so would prove absolutely nothing since Lenin’s theoretical position prevailed—the party was built—and it was the organization which seized “State power” in Russia.

Lenin had no sentimental illusions about the obstacles confronting the revolutionary movement in Russia. He knew perfectly well that no revolutionary organization had any possible hope of success unless secrecy was practiced and the membership of such an organization functioned with extreme caution. Only a well-disciplined body of revolutionaries could effectively undertake propaganda and agitational work inside a country like Russia.

Neither a parliament nor freedom of assembly existed there. Many less disciplined organizations than the type Lenin proposed had been violently crushed by the repressive forces of the Tsarist government. A brief glimpse of Russian history should, therefore, verify Lenin’s concern for organizational discipline.

Around 1867 a number of secret societies were formed in Russia. One of those societies was *Zemlia i Volia* [Land and Freedom]. Students who were members of this organization went among the Russian peasants in hopes of organizing a massive peasant revolt. The Narodniks (those students who attempted to organize peasant revolts), were singled out by the police, and either killed or imprisoned, or driven into exile. *Zemlia i Volia*, however, was revived in 1879. Shortly afterwards, a split occurred inside that movement. The *Narodnaia Volia* [The People’s Will] and *Cherngi Peredel* [The Black Partition] were the two organizations which emerged as a result of the split. The life span of both of these new organizations were extremely short. But before *Narodnaia Volia* was crushed by the police, they assassinated the Tsar, Alexander II, in 1881.

In 1898 the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (R.S.D.L.P.) was organized. Before this new party could establish itself, it was violently suppressed; and most of the leadership of, the R.S.D.L.P. were either arrested or driven into exile. Since Lenin had been identified with the First Congress of the R.S.D.L.P., he was a marked-man; and he had to go into exile. Undoubtedly, these historical experiences and many others weighed heavily upon Lenin’s mind when he

formulated the theory of the vanguard party.

But the past was not dominating his thinking in 1902. The present stage of development of the revolutionary movement in Russia and its future was foremost in Lenin's mind. It was obvious to Lenin that the movement had not reached the magnitude necessary to overthrow the Tsarist government. It was also obvious to him that the movement was ideologically weak. Something had to be done to insure the success of the movement. Lenin, therefore, proposed the establishment of a vanguard party.

Lenin did not merely propose an organization of professionally trained revolutionaries as a panacea for the ills of the Russian movement. His diagnosis was far more comprehensive. Lenin made it clear that there were three levels of struggle: 1) economic; 2) theoretical; 3) political. He also stated that the movement in Russia had to be genuine class struggle, transcending trade unionism and the bureaucratic red tape of trade union organizations. He further pointed out that political agitation could not be subordinated to agitation for an increase in workers wages and an improvement in working conditions. Economic agitation had to follow political agitation.

Lenin saw the struggle in Russia as more than a struggle against employers and government to firmly establish trade unionism. But the popular tendency among revolutionaries was this type of "Economism." Unlike the "Economist", Lenin recognized that in free countries the distinction between a political organization and a trade union was clear. "In Russia, however, the yoke of autocracy appears at first glance to obliterate all distinction between the Social-Democrats organization and workers' association, since all workers associations and all study circles are prohibited; and since the principal manifestation and weapon of the workers' economic struggle—the strike—is regarded as a criminal (and sometimes even as a political) offense."⁶ Because it was not easy to see the differences between a political organization and a trade union, many revolutionaries made the mistake of confining their work to trade union activities.

"The scope of revolutionary work is too narrow, as compared with the breadth of the spontaneous basis of the movement," Lenin exclaimed. Undoubtedly, Lenin was aware of the importance of the spontaneous and creative activity of the masses. In fact he always subordinated his views on organization to politics. That is, he never dealt with organization theoretically without looking at spontaneity (creative political activity of the masses). Therefore, Lenin's views on organization were always in tune with the spontaneous development

their employers and miserable working conditions, but also against the unions, which, in theory, represent them. More important, black workers are beginning to consciously and systematically support the struggle against colonialism and Imperialism. In the states of Maryland and Louisiana, black dock workers (longshoremen) refused to unload chrome from Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Black workers at Polaroid Camera Company have taken the lead in exposing that company and the United States involvement in the exploitation and oppression of black people in South Africa.

The activity of black workers in the United States is not dependent upon any vanguard party—an organized body of professional revolutionaries. With or without a formal organizational structure, black people in general will voice their opposition to oppression and exploitation. Usually new forms of organization emerge out of the spontaneous and creative political activity of workers. But there is nothing necessarily final or permanent about any organization which grows out of spontaneity. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers, for example, was a logical result of the self-organization and creative activity of black workers primarily in the automobile plants in Detroit. When that organization became a fetter, it disappeared. However, the hostility and the revolt of the black workers didn't disappear with it.

All one had to do is go into a bar where employed, underemployed and unemployed workers hang-out and listen very carefully. People will be discussing how fed-up they are with the excessive hours they have to work and also the hazards confronting them on their jobs. Quite often, people will be talking about the things they do to make sure they don't kill themselves by overworking. Very few people will say anything about retiring from a job. However, when they do, their major concern is will they be able to last long enough to retire; and, if so will they live long enough afterwards to enjoy the meager pension benefits their employer will send them.

The economics of the epoch breeds discontent among the working class as a whole. Black people tend to be the most hostile and rebellious element of the working class, primarily because of their historical relation to the productive process, as both an exploited class and race. Actually, black people have been conditioned for political struggle by modern capitalist society itself. Their capacity for self-organization has been enhanced tremendously by the rapid development of the United States.

The mistake most black political leaders make is to view the black masses as backward, unorganized and undisciplined. That is the attitude which has driv-

was ITAC which is essentially a trade union movement based in Jamaica (West Indies). Unlike ITAC, the League did not view itself as a federation of trade unions. In July 1970, the League published *The Overall Program of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers*. That document stated that the League was first and foremost a political organization. "Most importantly, the direction of our organization is clear", the document read. "We are not talking about dealing with a single issue as the only factor, nor are we talking about reforms in the system; but we are talking about the seizure of state power."

Just as Lenin saw the vanguard party as a necessity for seizing state power in 1905, the leadership of the League saw the vanguard party as a necessity for seizing state power in the United States. The aforementioned document outlining the League program contained the following statement: "It is clear to us that the development of our struggle based on concrete realities dictates the need for a black people's liberation political party. We state, unequivocally that this must be a black Marxist-Leninist party designed to liberate black people; dedicated to leading the workers struggle in this country and resolved to wage a relentless struggle against imperialism."

It was a mistake for the leadership of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers to concentrate its energies upon building a Marxist-Leninist party. Like most organizations today which view themselves as a vanguard party, the League developed an unmanageable bureaucracy. All decisions and directives flowed from the hierarchy down through the various sub-leadership groups to the rank-and-file. This led to the rise of commandism and dogmatism within the organizational structure. Thus, the leadership became overly concerned with the administration of the organization.

By the end of 1971, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers had totally disintegrated. Even though the League's executive body was composed of seasoned young black politicals, very little theoretical work had been undertaken by this leadership group. That leadership group had made very few attempts to expand the League's contact with workers outside the Detroit area. Essentially, it had limited itself to superimposing an obsolete organizational form upon an organization which by its very existence negated the whole notion of the necessity for a vanguard organization.

Despite the disintegration of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, black workers are still organizing themselves in opposition to inhuman working conditions, inadequate wages, excessive working hours, discriminatory employment practices, etc. They are waging a relentless struggle not only against

of the movement.

"Where in 1902, Lenin wanted the party to be a tight closely knit, small grouping with very exclusive standards for membership, he in 1905, wrote that workers should be incorporated into the ranks of the party organization by the hundreds of thousands."⁷ The general strike which took place in 1903; culminating in the October strike of 1905 which momentarily paralyzed the Russian economy; forced Lenin to adopt his new attitude.

In 1902 Lenin's conception of organization had obviously been forced on him. There was nothing fixed or permanent in his mind about organization. When Lenin advanced the theory of the Vanguard party, he was simply trying to provide the revolutionary movement with a clear understanding of how to combat certain specific, concrete and objective obstacles in the way of the revolution.

He never envisioned the vanguard party as an end in itself. It was to be the vehicle which would make it possible for the revolution to triumph. When Lenin proposed the creation of a body of professionally trained revolutionaries the movement in Russia was very weak. Just in terms of the number of people involved, that movement was relatively small in size in comparison with present day movements.

It is important to keep in mind that Russia was essentially a backward peasant society when the revolution occurred. According to the revolutionary theories of the time, Russia was the last place one would expect a successful revolution to occur. Most revolutionaries believed that the more advanced industrial nations would be the first to experience a violent upsurge of the mass of the population. But that did not mean that revolutionaries in the less developed capitalist countries had to sit around and wait on the revolution to occur first in places like Germany. No, they were expected to struggle relentlessly to build a revolutionary movement in less developed countries in anticipation of revolution in the highly industrialized countries.

That is what Lenin did. He submerged himself in the theoretical and practical tasks which were being created by the rapid development of the Russian movement. Unlike many of his comrades, Lenin was a very disciplined personality. He didn't play around with the notion of revolution. For revolutionary politics is very serious business. It's not something that can be approached in a haphazard manner.

7 Raya Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom*, Twayne Publishers, New York, 1958. P. 182.

Questions facing a revolutionary movement must be pursued consciously, methodically, and systematically. That is why Lenin emphasized the need for revolutionary theory in *What Is To Be Done*. “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement,” Lenin said. This is something we can’t overemphasize. Lenin continued, “when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity.”⁸

Lenin never waived from his position on the importance of revolutionary theory. His writings which have been organized into a forty-five volume set (*Collected Works of Lenin*) represent his continuous effort to keep before the movement in Russia a sense of direction.

Many people have been inspired by Lenin’s writings. For Lenin was fundamentally a Marxist. He never confided in any class except the working class. That was the only class that was consistently revolutionary. It was the only class that could unite the nation and take the socialist revolution to its completion. It was, therefore, the class which ultimately had to constitute the armed vanguard of the Russian revolution.

Both before and after Lenin’s party came to power in Russia, Lenin stated unequivocally that “Soviet” power had to be instituted in Russia. What Lenin meant was this: control had to be in the hands of the workers and peasants. “Power to the Soviets” meant allowing the majority of the people’s initiative and independence, not only in the election of deputies, but also in state administration in, effecting reforms and various other changes.⁹

For Lenin the transfer of power to the workers and peasants was a simple matter. In the *Impending Catastrophe and How To Combat It* he spelled out the procedure for establishing the “only control which is real.” First, a revolutionary government has to issue certain decrees. The next step is to call upon the mass of the population to carry out the decrees and to smash the resistance of the exploiters. Nothing else was needed. “No special machinery, no special preparatory steps on the part of the state would be required,”¹⁰ Lenin declared.

In 1917 Lenin repeatedly and explicitly pointed out that the revolutionary movement in Russia had to be organized in a new way. By that time the key question at hand was the question of state power. The specific question was which class was to hold power. For the class which held power decided every-

The leadership of the Black Panther Party failed to realize that it was impossible to concentrate the revolutionary energies of the black masses into a party bureaucracy. They did not understand the dialectic relationship between organization and spontaneity. That is, the Central Committee of the Black Panther Party did not realize that their strength as an organization came as a result of the self-organization and creativity of the black masses. The major reason why that organization had become a national threat is because black youths across the United States initiated action in the name of the Black Panther Party. Also, the reason why the Panthers weren’t totally destroyed is because black people spontaneously rose to their defense.

Black political leadership in general should have learned a great deal from the experiences of the Black Panther Party. The leadership of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, in particular, should have learned from mistakes the Panthers were making. Like the Panthers, the leadership of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers also tried to build a Marxist-Leninist Party. They failed miserably too, except their failure was not a result of violent police repression.

Even though the national impact of the Black Panther Party was much greater than the League’s impact, the potential of the League was much greater than the Panther’s potential. The membership of the League was largely people at the point of production. That in itself gave the League an advantage that most other organizations didn’t have: it didn’t have to rely heavily upon adventurous and militaristic intimidation. Instead it could use the threat of a general strike as its most powerful weapon by black workers.

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers grew out of the self-organization of black workers in the automobile plants in Detroit in 1967. The first organization to develop out of this spontaneity was the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) in 1968 in the Hamtramck Assembly Plant of the Chrysler Corporation. DRUM served as a catalyst for the Eldon Axle Revolutionary Movement (ELRUM); Ford Revolutionary Union Movement (FRUM); Chevrolet Revolutionary Union Movement (CRUM), etc. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers wasn’t actually organized until in 1969. It was formed to serve as the umbrella organization (i.e. it was a federation of various movements).

The formation of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers cemented Detroit’s reputation—“The heart of the Black Revolution.” No other organization of its caliber existed anywhere in the United States. The closest federation of black workers resembling the League of Revolutionary Black Workers

8 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, P. 369.

9 *One of the Fundamental Questions of Revolution*, Vol. 25. Pp. 368 & 373.

10 *Impending Catastrophe and How To Combat It*, Vol. 25. P. 331.

been identified as possible hot spots. Over twenty million dollars was poured into Detroit, Michigan alone. Immediately after the 1967 rebellions, large sums of monies were poured into most relatively large black communities via such agencies as: Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW); Housing and Urban Development (HUD); Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), etc. These monies went into programs which were specifically designed either to co-opt localized movements or to violently repress them if cooptation proved impossible.

Most black organizations were suckered into accepting monies from governmental agencies. Those organizations which refused such monies and continued to aggressively challenge the appendages of American capitalism were categorized as "Black Extremists." The so-called extremists became victims of constant police harassment and brutality. The extremists were jailed, murdered, or forced into exile.

The Black Panther Party suffered the most serious blows during this period. That organization was singled out by the United States government as the most serious threat to the internal security of the nation. Subsequently, a national campaign was initiated to destroy the Black Panther Party. That campaign reached its most violent height with the raid on the Black Panther Party's headquarters in Chicago, Illinois. Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were assassinated by the Chicago police department in that particular raid.

The Black Panther Party was unable to withstand the swift and violent assaults emanating from a national plan to destroy them. No organization functioning as a vanguard had any possible chance of doing so. But, instead of moving away from the notion of building a Marxist-Leninist Party, the Black Panthers sunk deeper into it. New recruits were forced to memorize certain Marxist clichés. After memorizing these clichés, these up-starts in the Black Panther Party went around quoting Marx and Lenin without understanding Marxism-Leninism, particularly its application to the black movement in the United States.

As a Marxist-Leninist Party based on Lenin's theory of the vanguard party, the Black Panthers had no choice but to attach a fundamental importance to organization. As a vanguard organization, it had to have a party "line" which all members were bound to follow. The representatives of the party had to be agents whose sole function was to carry out decisions made for them by the Central Committee. Anyone that was caught in serious violation of party rules and regulations had to be exposed in the party newspaper and purged. The maintenance of the party "line" and discipline had to prevail at all times.

thing.

Lenin insisted that the "Soviets" had to hold power. In other words, the "dictatorship of the proletariat" had to be established. But before that could be done, the Provisional Government, (which had been set up after the overthrow of the Tsarist regime) had to be crushed.

Around October 1917 the Provisional Government (Kerensky's government) collapsed and Lenin's party (the Bolsheviks) came to power. But the seizure of state power by the Bolsheviks did not resolve the fundamental question of state power. Historical hindsight tells us that the seizure of state power by Lenin's party was only a necessary step in the chain of events making up the Russian Revolution.

Even though the seizure of state power by the Bolsheviks represented a victory for both the proletariat and peasantry, historical hindsight again tells us that the task of instituting "Soviet" power still remained. That task was the challenge which confronted Lenin and his party.

To say the least, the Bolsheviks failed to transfer power to the workers and peasants. Instead they created a huge bureaucracy which became the obstacle which continues to stand in the way of the revolution in Russia.

Today, it is impossible to side-step the fact that once the Bolshevik Party came to power—it was no longer the vanguard—the vanguard party and the machinery of government became one. The Bolsheviks had, in fact, inherited the old state apparatus.

Lenin, consequently, found himself in constant struggle to resolve one of the fundamental contradictions of the Russian Revolution. He knew exactly what had to be done, but sudden illness and death cut short his efforts to chart out a new revolutionary path for Russia.

Before Lenin died he said, "Two main tasks confront us which constitute the epoch to reorganize our machinery of state, which is utterly useless, and which we took over in its entirety from the preceding epoch... Our second task is the educational work among the peasants."¹¹ The Party, however, did not undertake the tasks Lenin defined as essential.

Following Lenin's death, the power struggle between Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky took on a new character. It had become a struggle which would determine who would succeed Lenin. It would also determine the future course of the Russian Revolution.

Stalin won out over Trotsky. Subsequently, the abortion of the Russian

¹¹ "On Co-operation," Vol. 33. P. 474.

Revolution proceeded with rapidity and the wholesale corruption of Lenin's ideas went into full swing. Undoubtedly, Lenin knew that it would happen. For in his *Last Will and Testament* he stated explicitly that Stalin must not succeed him. Trotsky was Lenin's choice. However, Lenin felt that Trotsky had one major flaw: he was overly confident and spent too much time with administrative details.

Since Lenin's death, there has been a raging debate over the theory of the vanguard party. All the polemical discussions have revolved around the universal applicability of what Lenin put forward in 1905. On one side of the fence, we have the vanguardists, who maintain that revolution is impossible unless there is a vanguard party leading it. On the other side of the fence are the politicians who argue that there is no longer any need for an organization of professional revolutionaries forming some sort of permanent leadership.

Our task here is to decide where Lenin stands on the question of the vanguard party. We already have some idea. That is, we know Lenin's concept of the type of organizational need was constantly expanding in proportion to the development of not only the Russian Revolution but also in proportion with the World Revolution.

Lenin made it clear in one of his last statements what would determine the final outcome of the revolution. "In the last analysis," he said, "the outcome of the struggle will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, China, etc., account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe. And during the past few years it is this majority that has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity, so that in this respect, there cannot be the slightest doubt what the final outcome of the world struggle will be. In this sense, the complete victory of socialism is fully and absolutely assured."¹²

It is important to keep in mind that Lenin never said a vanguard organization or party would be the determining factor of the revolution. Lenin knew that even in a place like Russia it was not the Party, but the initiative and independence of the workers and peasants, which would make the socialist revolution possible.

In other words, Lenin saw the self-organization of the masses as the essential condition for the continuous success of the Russian Revolution. Self-organization translated into theoretical language is called Spontaneity. So we must conclude that Lenin was not opposed to spontaneity, as some people are contending, or as it may appear from a misreading of *What Is To Be Done*.

of those organizations could gain hegemony (total control) over the movement. Their roles and longevity were determined by the social forces from which they sprung. Some of the organizations which emerged, only lasted a day or so, and the only form some of them took was mass action. But that is less important than the impact they had and the content of their activity.

Seemingly, the "Black Revolution" blossomed overnight. The new militancy which was contained in the political banner, Black Power; and symbolized by the Black Panther Party, had been brewing since 1963. It was a direct consequence of the violent experiences of the Civil Rights Movement. What appeared to be little insignificant, isolated and incidental conflicts between a black person and "official" symbols of authority (police, teachers, social workers, etc.) only served to bring this militancy to its boiling point. Of course, the media also helped to heat the pot. The media did that unintentionally by distorting, sensationalizing and vulgarizing this new militancy in an attempt to discredit it.

However, the new militancy of the black community could not be discredited. Once it was set into motion it immediately found a place in the "souls of black folks": consequently, it was impossible to prevent it from spreading. As soon as activity broke out in a town, country or city, black people living there would get on their telephones and inform their friends and relatives living in other places. If they did not call, they would write letters and describe what was happening. When letter writing and telephoning failed, independent black newspapers carried the news from one area to another.

Black people effectively exploited the advance communications system, which has been developed inside the United States. Even the people in the most remote rural areas of the country were aware of what was happening because they have access to radios, television, newspapers, magazines and telephones, just like people in highly industrial urban communities. Since the majority of black people are city dwellers anyway, keeping the majority of the black population abreast of developments was not a major problem, except that so many things were occurring so fast.

Local state and national governmental agencies tried with little success to prevent the spread of this new black militancy. The Model Cities Demonstration Agency Act (which was passed by the United States Congress in 1966), was the first major step taken to curb the rise of "Black Power" and the influence of the Black Panther Party. Millions and millions of dollars were earmarked for cities which had either experienced the wrath of the black masses, or which had

12 "Better Fewer, But Better", Vol. 33. P. 501

ed with the correct approach to struggle through the activity of any vanguard organization.

Unfortunately, Huey failed to fully appreciate the significance of his own organization's entry into the American body politic in relation to the new upsurge of the black masses. Huey was not, however, the only one who failed to recognize and appreciate the capacity of the black masses for self-organization. Black leadership as a whole failed to do so. That was evident when black leaders at the National Black Political Convention held in Gary Indiana on March 10–12, 1972, declared: "We are the Vanguard. The challenge is to transform ourselves from favor-seeking vassals and loud-talking militant pawns, and to take up the role that the unorganized masses of our people have attempted to play..."

Although this declaration has a very nice ring, it only reflects the degenerate mentality that has overwhelmed black middle class leadership. How can bunch of self-proclaimed "favor-seeking vassals and loud-talking militant pawns" talk about transforming themselves into something else, and in the same breath proclaim themselves "the vanguard"? They aren't any vanguard. In fact, black middle class leadership is so disorganized that at the moment it would even be pretentious for them to define themselves as the rearguard of the black movement.

It is somewhat disgusting to hear self styled black leaders talk about leading the "unorganized" masses. It was the "unorganized" masses who congregated on the streets, defied curfews, engaged in direct physical confrontation with the police and military apparatus of the United States government, and unleashed a burning assault upon the property of their oppressors. If the black masses were unorganized, it definitely didn't appear that they were. George Novack said in an article in Newsweek magazine, Black Uprising, 1967, that: "the Afro-American struggle exhibited the power and creativity of an oppressed giant. The actions were spontaneous, spasmodic, uncontrolled, undirected and localized."

All the major rebellions erupted spontaneously and violently—Harlem in 1964, Watts in 1965, Newark and Detroit in 1967. No single organization or political personality can claim credit or take responsibility for what happened. The people who were responsible and to whom recognition must be given was a nameless mass. No one had to tell them what to do: they mobilized and organized themselves and did what had to be done.

Organization was their "least" problem. More black organizations mushroomed in the United States with the tremendous upsurge of the black masses during the 1960's than during any other period in American history. But none

What Lenin was opposed to in 1902 was the opportunistic and anarchistic tendencies among revolutionaries. He was opposed to the bureaucratic red tape which dominated the trade union movement. He was also opposed to the corruption of the whole notion of spontaneity (free and creative activity of the masses). These were just a few of the things which were stifling the development of the revolutionary movement in Russia before 1917.

Lenin felt that it was the responsibility of revolutionaries, like himself, to place their knowledge and special skills at the disposal of the mass movement. He felt that they could do that best through organization. Organization was not the end; it was only a means to achieve a higher purpose. Once the Bolshevik Party had seized "state power," the original purpose for the creation of that organization had been achieved. Something new, a new type of organization had to be created to carry the movement to its completion.

Lenin said that the new organism had to be "Soviet Power." Organization per se was no longer foremost in Lenin's mind, except that organization which emanates directly from the free and creative political activity of the masses. Lenin had absolute confidence in the workers' and peasants' ability to mobilize and organize themselves. He therefore told his Party on various occasions that they had to look to the workers and peasants for the leadership in the reorganization of the Russian economy. But the Party was imbued with the idea that leadership in the reorganization of the Russian an economy. The Party was imbued with the idea that leadership had to come from above rather than from below.

Spontaneity and Organization

But history, like agriculture draws its nourishment from the valleys and not from the heights, from the average social level and not from men of eminence.

—José Ortega y Gasset

Since the Russian Revolution in 1917, all uncertainties about what is required to bring about a complete revolutionary transformation of society has been removed.

Today we know that the essential condition for a revolutionary reconstitution of society is the self-movement and creative political activity of the mass of the world population. When we translate this recognition into theoretical language the essential condition for revolutionary change becomes Spontaneity.

Spontaneity is an abstract and universal concept like organization. It does not mean that things just happen out of the clear blue sky. Neither is it a call for anarchy. In simple language spontaneity means “Free and creative political activity”. It is merely a recognition of the importance of the self-movement of ordinary working people in relation to the activity of established organizations.

In the past, most people considered organization as the essential means for bringing about change, but to emphasize the importance of organization today is to emphasize essentially nothing. We have to be much more specific about the type of organization—churches, schools, social clubs, cooperatives, associations, trade unions, political parties, etc. are all forms of organization. None of these highly developed and established forms of organization represent the type of organization that is necessary to bring about fundamental changes in both economic and property relations in today’s society.

Our most cherished forms or organizations have repeatedly failed to take a decisive political position in relation to the political struggle of oppressed people. They have not demonstrated either the will or capacity to transform modern capitalist society (including those organizations with the most revolutionary posture, policies and programs). By now it should be clear that the dominant forms of organization are nothing more than “official” institutions of capitalist society. And that their very existence and influence depends entirely upon the continual development and domination of international capitalism.

In many respects it is clear that organization, as we have known it, is not the revolutionary answer. However, most intellectuals and other middle class scoundrels who cloak themselves in revolutionary rhetoric still attach a fundamental importance to organization, rather than to spontaneity. They look down on the spontaneous upsurge and creative political activity of the masses in the most distasteful way.

People from the ranks of the middle class are quick to describe the masses as backward, unorganized and undisciplined. They usually see the self-movement of ordinary people as disorganization. But the only disorganization present when there is a tremendous upsurge of the masses is the disorganization of the minds of those who are intellectually bankrupt.

During crisis situations, professionals have nothing to say except that we must approach our problems systematically. The type of organization most professionals see as necessary, is a small group of highly educated people meeting behind closed doors in a mahogany-furnished room, deciding the fate of the movement on paper. But what the professionals attempt to organize on paper:

Union leadership has repeatedly sold-out the interest of the American working class; thus making the “wildcat strike” a historical imperative. That is, workers have had to move in spite of and quite often in direct opposition to union leadership. Black workers in particular have had to take the initiative and act independent of organized labor to gain recognition and better positions in the production process. By doing so, black workers have not only increased their possibilities of progress in industry but they have also broken down many barriers which confronted the average workers irrespective of sex and color.

In 1938 Mzee C.L.R. James recognized the capacity of both the working class and the black movement for independent action. James stated that neither the working class nor the black movement had to wait on any vanguard organization. In respect to the development of the black movement he specifically upheld its independence and stated that it has “a vitality and a validity of its own... that it is able to exercise a powerful influence upon the revolutionary working class: that it has got a great contribution to make to the development of the working class in the United States, and that it is in itself a constituent part of the struggle for socialism”.

Today, many political elements pay lip-service to the theoretical formulation of Mzee (the wise old man); But neither the “white left” nor black political leadership has taken a decisive political stand in relation to the contention that the black movement must not be subordinated to any vanguard party. For all practical purposes, it is safe to say that the most militant and revolutionary leadership in the United States has almost completely retreated from the revolutionary ground plowed by Mzee C.L.R. James.

As soon as the black movement reached its peak in 1966 with Stokely Carmichael’s articulation of “Black Power”: and with the formation of the Black Panther Party—the theory of the vanguard party took root inside the black community. Conservatives, moderates, and militants elements, in chorus, began to sing about the need for a vanguard organization. And white “leftists” groups, organizations and personalities jumped on the bandwagon, in harmony, lending support to the specific idea of creating an independent black political party.

Black political leaders fell prey to the vanguard party theory in a very frightful way. By 1968 Huey P. Newton was stating that: “The sleeping masses must be bombarded with the correct approach to struggle through the activities of the vanguard party”. But the sleeping masses, as Huey defined them, were wide awake. They had never been asleep and they did not need to be bombard-

be seen when there is movement. We must also keep in mind Hegel's statement in *Science of Logic*: "all things are contradictory in themselves. Contradiction is the root of all movement and life, and it is only in so far as it contains a contradiction that anything moves and has impulse and activity."

The relationship between spontaneity and organization is very tricky and complex. One could spend a lifetime trying to identify the intrigues of the interconnection. But with the accumulation of new universal-historical facts one thing is certain: the essential condition for a revolutionary reconstitution of society is the self-movement and creative political activity of the masses. In other words, spontaneity must be King.

Black Leadership Fall Prey to Vanguardism

A vanguard is a vanguard only in special circumstances and in relation to certain very special purposes. It has no advantage in itself. There is not, and cannot be, any permanent selection of a group of individuals able to direct the working class.

—C.L.R. James

It is somewhat ironic that so many young black politicals still adhere to the theory of the vanguard party. The irony of the situation lies in the realization that historically the black masses have exploded with a disciplined Spontaneity.

The "Black Revolution" in America has never waited on or subordinated itself to any revolutionary party. Somehow black people have always recognized certain political opportunities; mobilized and organized themselves to take advantage of those opportunities. The self-movement and creativity of the black masses has had a much more profound and revolutionary impact upon developments in the United States than the activity of any organization masquerading as "the vanguard" of the American movement.

The only other movement which has shaken the American body politically, like the black movement, has been the labor movement. Even though the labor movements during the 1930's and 40's were heavily influenced by the propaganda of "leftist" parties, the strength of that movement is likewise to be found in the capacity of the working class for self-organization. That is much more evident today than it ever was because we have had an opportunity to see the limitations and contradictions of unions (a disguised form of the vanguard party) and "official" labor leadership.

poor people are busy organizing daily on their jobs, in their homes and communities.

The best planners and organizers in our society are people who have to hustle and scuffle everyday just to subsist. The "less educated", in terms of formal schooling and training, tend to be less idealistic in their approach to problems. On the surface, quite often it appears that the toiling masses are floating in an ocean of disorganization without a sense of direction and purpose. However, the ordinary man and woman is not as lost as he or she appears to be, and whenever the opportunity presents itself they demonstrate a phenomenal capacity to organize in society what revolutionaries, socialists, Marxist-Leninists, etc. try to organize in their heads.

Modern capitalist society itself has prepared the ordinary man and woman and created the conditions for the life-and-death struggles taking place in every corner of the world. In Asia, Latin America, Africa, etc., both workers and peasants have come to the forefront of every revolutionary movement demonstrating not only their readiness, but also their preparedness to take charge of society and create new institutions. But many obstacles have stood in their way.

The obstacle which causes the defeat, decline, and collapse of all revolutionary movements is the corruption of political leaders and political parties whom the masses put their confidence in. From the French Revolution and the creation of the Paris Commune in 1871, to the creation of Ghana; the only people who have shown a willingness to take the revolution to its completion has been the toiling masses. In each situation, however, organization has won out over Spontaneity. That is, those individuals and organizations which have been ushered into power have put a brake on the revolution. in an attempt to consolidate their own new power.

In every country today the masses are still violently opposed to the forces of oppression and exploitation. At certain critical moments in history the masses have seized the opportunity to register their opposition. And it has been the total refusal of the mass of populations; to be governed by an oppressive system which has made revolution possible.

On the contrary, political leaders, or small bands of men do not make revolutions. If it were possible for them to do so, revolutions would occur daily. It is not possible because modern capitalist society has reached a stage of both organization and disorganization which can only be successfully challenged by massive political upheaval.

We have to recognize that the world has changed tremendously since the

Russian revolution. What was possible and applicable then is neither possible nor applicable now. Time, place and circumstances must always be taken into consideration when we try to determine what is necessary to bring about fundamental changes in the world body politic. Few political leaders, however, take the time to do a thorough analysis of the world in which we live. If they did, they would see that the only people capable of getting us out of the mess we are in are the toiling masses.

The most serious mistake every political leader has made is not confiding in the masses. Instead they have placed their confidence in organization. But the type of organization that is essential for a transformation of any society can only be created through Spontaneity. That is, the people at the point of production and the exchange process are the only ones who can straighten out the mess created by the capitalist mode of production. They are the only ones that can organize a new society..

“Spontaneity organizes”. That is something few political leaders and students of politics recognize. They don’t see that because organization is foremost in their heads; or better, the type of organization they are accustomed to is their only conception of organization. To them organization is something fixed, permanent, and holy. It is structured with an identifiable leadership separate from the rank-and-file. And the most concrete form organization takes in political leaders’ minds is a political party.

“Organization does not necessarily mean, however, a Vanguard or mass political party.”¹³ The specific and concrete form organization takes, varies in accordance with the objective situation and historical experiences confronting those oppressed and exploited people who discard their petty differences and engage in collective thought and action. The life span of every new form of organization which has emerged out of the spontaneous awakening and creative political activity of the masses is likewise determined by the circumstances and objective conditions under which an organized body of people have to function.

But more important than the form and longevity of organization is the content of its activity and what is achieved through it. It is imperative that we always keep our eyes focused on what a thing does. That is how we determine what it is and what purpose it serves. For instance, Frantz Fanon observed carefully the activity of African nationalist parties in his book, *The Wretched of the*

Earth. Fanon was able to determine that regardless of how revolutionary those parties were, the content of their activity showed that they were nothing more than replicas of European political parties. “The notion of the party is a notion imported from the mother country,” Fanon wrote. He stated further, “We have seen that inside the nationalist parties, the will to break colonialism is linked with another quite different will: that of coming to a friendly agreement with it.”

Robert Michels, in, his book *Political Parties* recognized that political parties in general tend to waver once they attain a certain degree of clout. Michels also noticed that as the strength of a political party grows “it loses its revolutionary impetus, becomes sluggish, not in respect to action alone, but also in the sphere of thought. “ One of the factors Michels attributed to the degeneration of these organizations was the fact that political parties do not want to irritate the State upon which their very existence depends. So, instead of encouraging political activity, political parties (including those which claim to be revolutionary) suppress politics.

The suppression of politics is a very highly organized activity. People who reject spontaneity consciously or unconsciously participate in this suppression, which is carried out in its most violent form by the policing apparatus of the State. Intellectuals, journalists, lecturers, political leaders, writers, professionals, etc., are the agents which are usually employed to discredit the creativeness in the self- movement of the masses. They spread the hysteria about riots, etc.

Today, however, people don’t riot. “Men who read Lenin, Fanon and Che... they mass, they rage, they dig graves,” wrote George Jackson in one of his letters from Soledad Prison, Salinas, California. The message that George Jackson was trying to transmit from prison was: although prison rebellions may seem unorganized, the activity of the men on the inside represents consciousness, creativity, discipline, organization and purpose. But when we read the newspaper, magazines and books frequently we are led to believe that prisoners are nothing more than animals acting without a sense of purpose and direction.

People who rebel, resist and enter into life and death struggles never act without a sense of direction. They know what they want and they organize themselves to get what they want. Contained within that. Spontaneity has a phenomenal capacity for organization. On the contrary, Spontaneity is not something divorced from organization. Both develop out of each other. At the abstractor theoretical level, some people define the relationship between organization and spontaneity as a contradiction. However, contradiction can only

13 A point George Rawick emphasized in a letter to Damali in response to the first draft of this document.