

politics in command

ON THE QUESTION
OF ARMED
STRUGGLE

WEATHER UNDERGROUND
ORGANIZATION



POLITICS IN COMMAND

by the Weather Underground Organization

The only path to the final defeat of imperialism and the building of socialism is revolutionary war. Revolution is the most powerful resource of the people. To wait, to not prepare the people for the fight is to seriously mislead about what kind of fierce struggle lies ahead.

Revolutionary war will be complicated and protracted. It includes mass struggle and clandestine struggle, peaceful and violent, political and economic, cultural and military, where all forms are developed in harmony with the armed struggle.

Without mass struggle there can be no revolution. Without armed struggle there can be no victory.

There are many on the left who self-righteously condemn all violence of revolutionaries. They are keeping their own hands clean by avoiding the full consequences of revolutionary ideas. For these people, the revolution will happen only some day and hopefully be made by somebody else. But power concedes nothing without a demand. Armed struggle is an extension of political struggle, just as war is politics with bloodshed. Under certain historical conditions political struggle leads necessarily to armed conflict. When a small ruling class maintains itself in power by force and violence, when the masses of people are forced to work and live in brutalized and violent conditions, political struggle both peaceful and violent is the inevitable result.

Violence is not a thing to want or a thing not to want. It cannot be called into being or wished out of existence. Violence is a monopoly of the U.S. state. It is woven into the very fabric of capitalism; in Rap Brown's words, "as American as cherry pie." U.S. official policy is violent and brutal: the brutal imperialist war of aggression in Viet Nam, the fascist coup in Chile, the colonial hold on Puerto Rico. Capitalism is a violent system having at its center the violent relationship of exploiter and exploited, worker and boss, a relationship of oppression and constant struggle. Under capitalism, armies of women are forced into prostitution. Black people's life expectancy is ten years less than that of white folks, old people are discarded after they've worked away the better part of their lives. The status quo is murder.

Fighting for the future will be painful, but in the long run it is the only thing that can end pain. As Jose Marti said of Cuba eighty years ago: "The island, like a resurrection, lifts herself in her agony, sees the mud which covers her and

the bloody road leading to liberty and prefers the blood to the mud."

Reactionary capitalist violence is criminal; revolutionary violence will bring about the new society. Marxism-Leninism holds that "the fundamental question of every revolution is the question of power." Marx considered violence as "the midwife of all old societies about to bring forth a new one." The capitalist system of private property is protected forcibly by a group of violent, dangerous men. The development of mass revolutionary violence is essential to smash the state of the exploiters and to wrest power from the armed defenders of imperialism.

Organized armed struggle shows people their great strength and potential for seizing and holding power and shows the weaknesses of the government, corporate capitalism, and the military. Armed struggle can inspire and organize, carry on the tradition of resistance and train fighters by fighting. The capacity to carry out successful armed struggle in harmony with political struggle must be built at every stage of the revolution and cannot be put off on the excuse that it is always premature. For the seizure of power from the imperialists, armed struggle will be decisive.

A generation of fighters was produced by the movements of the 1960s. Opposition to the violence of everyday life led to organized popular violence. The rebellions of urban Black communities were training grounds for revolution. Robert Williams, Rap Brown, Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party, forced the recognition of the necessity of violent revolution.

Resistance to the Viet Nam war included thousands of people who participated in militant protest, clandestine or armed actions against the warmakers, burning draft boards, destroying corporate and military files. Sabotage grew and spread thru the armed forces. Bombings of war-related targets were understood and welcomed and built the popular movement: the bombing of power lines into defense plants in Colorado in 1968 (an action for which Cameron Bishop is on trial now), the Sam Melville bombings in New York in 1969, the destruction of the Army Math Research Center in Madison in 1970, and the bombings of the Capital and the Pentagon by the Weather Underground Organization.

With the development of popular and guerrilla warfare against U.S. imperialism on three continents our movement could not hang back from armed struggle, nor could its leaders say "not us."

Revolutionary armed struggle is a fact of life in the US, conceived and carried out by a wide diversity of people and groups and organizations. This is a sign of maturity in our movement. Armed action is an integral part of the left, as varied and creative as the nations and peoples which exist inside the borders of the US. Although the guerrilla forces are decentralized and follow different and sometimes contradictory strategies, we are unified in our spirit of love for the people of the world, hatred of imperialism and determination to make revolution by every means necessary. There have been serious losses--comrades killed and imprisoned--but still the guerrilla community survives, grows and renews. We greet and support other revolutionary groups waging armed struggle and believe that the struggle over the strategy for revolution among these forces is a critical one.

Politics in Command

Our job is not only to carry out action--that is comparatively simple. Our job is to succeed in making a revolution. The guerrillas, like all revolutionaries, bear the responsibility of developing full political strategy, and a mistake in military strategy can be deadly. The stakes are high, not only for the people and organizations carrying out military work, but for the course of the revolution. Ho Chi Minh said, "a military without politics is like a tree without roots--useless and dangerous." That is why we use the slogan "Politics in Command."

The critical task of all the diverse forces now engaging in some form of armed struggle in our country is to learn the laws of revolutionary warfare and apply them to the concrete conditions of the US today. We must learn from the revolutionary experiences of Viet Nam, Guinea-Bissau, Cuba, China, Russia. There is a tremendous literature to study such as The Military Art of People's War by Vo Nguyen Giap and Lenin's On Partisan Warfare. We also have a rich although hidden history of guerrilla warfare in our own land to draw upon: the resistance wars of the Native Americans, the underground railroad, John Brown's attempt to create a freed-slave army in the mountains of the border states, Emma Goldman and the anarchist fighters, the labor battles and Abraham Lincoln Brigade of the thirties, Tijerina in New Mexico. Most of all we must familiarize ourselves thoroughly with all aspects of the enemy's situation and all aspects of our own: we must analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy's forces and of our own forces with ruthless honesty.

We are at an early stage of a protracted revolutionary war. We need strategy to last, to grow and organize for many years to come, a strategy to preserve and expand our forces, armed revolutionary forces and political movement: a strategy for study as well as training, tactical retreat as well as escalation. We evaluate action by analyzing the extent to which it reflects and builds organization, reflects accountability to a mass base, whether actions win people and encourage them to act or develop passivity among people. It's not a popularity question: at this point a comparatively small sector of the population actively supports armed struggle. Action which is advanced should pull forward the people's understanding of the enemy and people's willingness to fight. People, groups and organizations engaged in action must take all of these factors into account. This is the meaning of "Politics in Command."

Our goal is to build communist organization toward the stage where armed struggle becomes a mass phenomenon led by a Marxist-Leninist party: a revolutionary stage. Organization is the strongest resource of the people. Organization unites and builds, and means that each day's efforts add up. Organization is made up of individuals, but is bigger and longer lasting than any one individual. Individuals are precious, but organization is decisive. Only organization allows continuity of experience and leadership, and carries the deeds of the individual fighters beyond themselves into the future. Organization capable of waging full internal political struggle around direction, and capable of uniting in action directs people's energies like a spear. Only combative organization can resist infiltration and repression and combat the highly organized and trained forces of the state.

The strategic necessity for this period is to mobilize the oppressed and exploited people against US imperialism. Militarily this is the stage of armed propaganda; the test of action is primarily the ability to win the people. Because imperialism is in decline, whole sectors of the poor and working population can be won to a radical perspective. In Viet Nam the seeds of the liberation army were called armed propaganda units--Ho Chi Minh insisted on emphasizing the word propaganda. Viet Nam teaches that in revolutionary war firepower is only one factor, and not the key factor in determining who wins and who loses. Consciousness is decisive. At this point, timing is critical because timing helps make action comprehensible. Guerrillas must integrate armed struggle with mass political struggle thru precision

and timing, to point out to the movement and to the people the strategic and political necessity for armed struggle and for revolution. In this stage armed action provides a consistency of militant opposition and action over time and is a beacon of hope to the hopeless.

The bombing of the State Department by the WUO in January 1975 is one example of effective integration of military and political struggle--millions of people opposed increasing aid to South Viet Nam and Cambodia, and thousands demonstrated in active opposition to US policy; the target and tactic and action were clear. The beauty of the SLA food distribution program a year ago was that it brought thousands of people into direct touch with the guerrilla struggle, served the people and both exposed the scale on which hunger exists in the US and pointed to the enemy who cause it. The active and aware support of thousands on the food lines was an enormous accomplishment. The attack by the Black Liberation Army on Manhattan district attorney Frank Hogan's armed guard in May 1971 was built on years of demonstrations and hatred against that corrupt tyrant who was responsible for the unjust imprisonment of thousands of Black people, and the action was widely understood. All these actions represent the effective combination of military and political struggles.

Three Incorrect Strategies

There are three theories of guerrilla warfare which we reject as the path to revolution in the US: the war against fascism theory, the foco theory and the retribution theory.

Terrible fascist conditions prevail for Third World peoples living in the US: intolerable prison life, Indian reservations, mass deportation for Mexicans, widespread sterilization without consent of Black and Third World women. Of these conditions of repression and subjugation there can be no doubt. But this is different from characterizing the present stage of the development of imperialism as a fascist system, and therefore the stage of the struggle as the war against facism. Any view of the power of the state as monolithic is wrong and self-defeating. The cracks within the system are also widening. It is our job to put pressure on the cracks, to make a class analysis of the forces in opposition to imperialism and to develop all of those forces on the appropriate level. Every means of struggle must be utilized. We have by no means reached the end of mass political struggle and public movements--not unless we declare it so, instead of mobilizing it. While the state is increas-

ingly computerizing and centralizing its repressive apparatus, it is also subject to major setbacks which the left should be organizing and pushing. Watergate was one of these. Other factors hold back the full force of the state--mass consciousness of government illegality, suspicion of informers, the power of a strong non-collaboration stand in the face of grand juries.

Based on the war against fascism analysis of this period is a primarily military conception of the role of action: that the criterion of a good action is the damage it does to the state, the toll that can be taken, the felt blow. This is one aspect, but not primary. It becomes more significant as contention for power develops, but it is wrong to conclude that the revolution is contending for state power now.

The foco theory holds that a revolutionary group proves and establishes itself only through armed action, that action alone gives a group leadership in the movement--that is, action in command; the guerrilla foco is the little motor which sets in motion the big motor, the mass movement. That is, the existence of the guerrilla struggle in and of itself politicizes the masses. We reject this theory for the concrete conditions of the US today.

Revolutionary action inspires and helps mobilize the people but there is no magical relationship between guerrilla action in and of itself and successful revolution. Many factors are necessary: the people must be organized and prepared as well as inspired. These things do not happen by themselves. The moments when qualitative leaps of consciousness and leaps into mass action are taken are built on years of struggle and organizing. To survive the hunt of the repressive apparatus, the guerrillas must be protected by an organized and combative movement, by the political organization of the people, by mass political action. All of these forms help lay the basis for the eventual mobilization of the revolutionarized people against the state--the armed struggle of the oppressed, people's war. The guerrilla groups have a critical role to play but the gun cannot lead. The gun is necessary, but its usefulness is only realized when politics are in command, when it is part of the correct revolutionary strategy.

Even a far higher level of military organization and action than any group in this country has yet achieved gives no automatic guarantee of sparking organized mass movement. The Tupamaros, whose brilliant actions over ten years almost paralyzed Uruguay, criticised their own overly mili-

tary approach. The people remained unorganized spectators and supporters of the war of the guerrillas against the state, not full participants. The pro-imperialist bourgeoisie has been able to regain and consolidate their power, to institute a terrible dictatorship which the Tups and the Uruguayan people continue to fight.

Armed action, even when it does not succeed, even when those who carry it out are defeated, even if it is not part of an overall strategy, provides a revolutionary example for those who will come later, and enters into the heart of the people. This is true. Action is exemplary, and the beginnings of armed struggle are a challenge to the comfortable left. It is a laying of self on the line for the struggle, and sparks the imaginations and courage of thousands of people. Fighters who have given their lives are much loved and live on. But this is not enough. Action must be planned to succeed: the object is to win. Revolutionary examples always have arisen and will always arise. They spring from the depths of the people's subjugation. But the task of the armed revolutionary organization at this point is to make a plan to help ensure the victory of the people in a long and costly war. The people need success, need victories, need power.

That is why the rationale of the exemplary foco is inadequate. Each action, each risk, must be taken for good reason. Guerrillas can seldom afford to go into battle which they know they will lose. This is an axiom of Vo Nguyen Giap. Of course this is never entirely within our own control. There are a hundred factors involved in every action--we can only take care of a certain number of them, and sometimes the enemy forces us to act. But choosing our own time and battlefield is one of the great strengths of the guerrillas. That is how we preserve and build our forces.

Finally we reject the conception that the role of the guerrilla force is to create chaos inside the belly of the beast, the oppressor nation, to bring about disorder through action. We are not pacifists. We know very well that life will be taken and lost in the process of revolution, and that the birth of the new society, like the birth of a new human being, is bloody and painful. But revolutionary violence must be specific, comprehensible to the people, and humane. The violence of the revolution must be clearly distinguishable to the oppressed and exploited people, from the violence of capitalist society. People do not need us to be fearful, or to create chaos. Chaos prevails. Our task is to show the way out of the madness. All revolution-

ary communists love peace. We must win the trust of the people that the revolution represents a real alternative, a love of human life unlike the carelessness of life that characterizes imperialism.

That is the fault of the strategy of an eye for an eye in our country at this time: we can never match the violence of the enemy one for one, or avenge each death. We retaliate in order to educate people and to exact a price for imperial crimes, to sow unease, confusion, doubt and fear in the enemy camp. Our job is always to distinguish between the violence of the empire and the violence of the revolution. This will be true even when we are engaged in day to day warfare. This is also the only way to prevent the enemy from carrying out false murderous acts in the name of the guerrillas. In the mountains, when the Fidelista prisoners were being tortured and summarily executed by the dictatorship, Fidel's doctors healed the wounded enemy soldiers, disarmed them and set them free. Fidel taught the difference between the army of Batista and the army of the people.

We must never hesitate to fight, but we must never build any mystification around violence. We must be a force of armed militants, not militarists. Another important aspect of this is that revolutionaries have to tell the truth: we cannot make inflated claims about who we are and what we represent. We must win the trust of the people and this will only develop through our own consistency of practice over time.

We do not condemn violence that originates from the left, just as we do not condemn violence that originates from the working class. The oppressed peoples and the working class have a right and an obligation to develop armed struggle as a means to liberation.

It is a right wing error to argue that only legal forms of struggle are legitimate. For some, no level of mass struggle will justify armed struggle; these are naive and irresponsible people, never ready to raise the question of violence or of the need to fight and ultimately win state power. They play into the state's strategy to separate out the warriors from the other parts of the revolutionary movement. Guerrillas and the fighters who are in prison must be supported and struggled with, taught and learned from. Our revolution will need both open and clandestine movements legal and illegal struggle, peaceful and armed struggle--and we will need harmony and organization among all levels of the struggle toward the goal of a revolutionized and fighting people.