

What to hold on to, What to reconsider, What to discard

Greetings to fellow activists:

We are several veterans of the revolutionary movements of the 1960's, 70's, 80's, and 90's, who have gotten together to sum up our experiences. We aim to focus the key lessons of those years, in order to assist the activists of *this* decade in reaching for *new* stages of organizational development and revolutionary effectiveness. As we have begun to re-examine our experience, we have met many young activists who have been asking and discussing how to develop organizations which can guide efforts to connect the wide experience of activist struggles with serious and real preparations for making revolution in the United States against capitalism and imperialism. This is a serious challenge for all of us.

Some of the experiences of the last few decades are of lasting value, others deserve much serious re-examination, while still others are not so important or are clearly wrong directions to take. We want to focus our efforts on the most important problems and questions, those which must be answered in order for the revolutionary movement to move forward. We have tried to list below some of the most important areas, and they are mainly in the form of questions.

We need your help. If you agree that these are critical questions, we hope you will share your views with us. If you think these questions need some elaboration, or particular aspects especially need attention, please let us know. Tell us if you think we are not asking the right questions, or if there are other problems that are more important to you, that we should be focusing on.

We don't promise to come up with all the answers, But we have the responsibility to share what we know, and join together with you, to create not only a better movement but a new world.



From the mass upsurges of the 1960s to the present, several different scenarios for revolution in the U.S. have been advanced. By "revolution," we mean a conscious act that puts an end to capitalism, imperialism and national oppression, and ~~then~~ establishes a socialist society.

In these scenarios, we assume the prerequisite development of a "revolutionary situation," in which the whole system is in deep crisis, millions of people are in a revolutionary mood, and revolutionary organizations and communities of resistance are sufficiently developed to contest for state power. In each of these scenarios, a revolutionary situation could arise from a number of conditions: ~~economic collapse~~ ^{SEVERE ECONOMIC CRISIS}; revolutions in large and/or strategically important areas of the world; war between the U.S. and competing imperialist powers; major ecological catastrophe; or

1 a combination of them.

2 **Scenario #1: After a lengthy period of mass political organizing, popular**
3 **armed uprisings take place in several major cities, followed by a coordinated**
4 **insurrection in as many cities and areas of the country as possible. With**
5 **newly liberated areas as a base, the revolutionary forces fight a civil war to**
6 **defeat the government's armed forces and its diehard supporters.**

7 **Scenario #2: Revolutionary and pro-democracy forces successfully struggle**
8 **for reforms with a major focus in the electoral arena. As this struggle to**
9 **extend democracy isolates the most reactionary sectors of the bourgeoisie, the**
10 **diehard rightists launch a military coup d'etat (similar to Chile in 1973). At**
11 **this point (and unlike Chile), the revolutionary forces would be prepared to**
12 **defeat the rightists, the military and the police in order to safeguard and**
13 **extend the democratic gains of the people.**

14 **Scenario #3: Oppressed people of color in the United States, either in**
15 **coordination with one another or in separate movements, respond to**
16 **mounting racist police attacks, massive incarceration, mounting**
17 **unemployment, and launch serious insurrectionary movements aimed at**
18 **secession and independence. In conjunction with international liberation**
19 **movements and a severe governmental and economic crisis in the United**
20 **States, some of these efforts actually succeed, at least for a time.**

21 **Scenario #4: Urban guerilla warfare develops, based largely in Black, Latino**
22 **and other communities of color. A variety of revolutionary armed**
23 **propaganda actions arouse people to revolutionary activity, and demonstrate**
24 **the vulnerability of the state. As new revolutionary armed units are formed**
25 **that are based in and are supported by the oppressed communities, the**
26 **government is increasingly beleaguered and losing control on all sides, and is**
27 **finally defeated.**

28 **Scenario #5: Even if the U.S. experiences a severe crisis in the years ahead,**
29 **too many people will remain apathetic. More importantly, the U.S.**
30 **government and economy is too powerful. There has never been a socialist**
31 **revolution in a highly developed capitalist country, and there is very little**
32 **chance that there will be one in our lifetime. We should focus our efforts on**
33 **winnable reforms and support for popular movements in other parts of the**
34 **world where conditions are more favorable.**

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2 Each of these scenarios is based on a different view of the world and of what kind of
3 opportunities may develop. Each scenario implies a different strategy for revolution. Each
4 scenario also requires building a different kind of organization. We hope that examining and
5 discussing them will help all of us clarify our thinking and determine what needs to be done to
6 advance our movement.

7 Especially during an election year, all the mechanisms of bourgeois influence work
8 overtime to convince people that they can express themselves through the electoral system; that
9 they can secure the things they need or want the most through the two-party system, or through a
10 relentless and long campaign to alter the electoral equations through new third-party efforts.
11 Many people buy into these campaigns, either because they do not demand or desire things much
12 different than what they already have, or because they've been convinced that since big changes
13 will never happen, they should push for and settle for minor changes. In this way the structures of
14 imperialism and of systemic injustice and exploitation evade the focus and debate.

15 But a number of people inevitably, and increasingly during periods of system-wide crisis,
16 decide that only by means of revolution can the changes that are necessary be brought. And
17 revolution in a country like this one involves massive efforts by (eventually) tens of millions of
18 people, to put an end to the old rotten system and to build a new society out of the ashes of the
19 old.

20 How to get from the situation we face and work in today, to that in the future? This
21 involves many things, many new relations between people, concentrated and exemplified by new
22 forms of organization. Chief among these are the development of revolutionary organizations,
23 based on the far-reaching understandings which revolutionary classes and people have gained
24 through ferocious, often bitter, and often bloody experience. It is on this area that we believe
25 much serious discussion and examination of our history needs to be focused:

26 **1. Should an organization be secret or open?**

27 **To what extent does a revolutionary organization need to be secret, or open?**
28 **Under present conditions, how does an organization prepare for when the**
29 **government makes political opposition illegal? How does an organization**
30 **protect itself from attack, disruption,**
31 **surveillance and infiltration by the government?**

32 **2. Should it have a mass or cadre character?**

1 **What level of consciousness, activity and revolutionary commitment should**
2 **be required to be a member of this organization? How much political**
3 **training and experience in revolutionary work should go on before a person**
4 **is recruited?**

5 **3. How should a revolutionary group organize itself and function so that it**
6 **stays closely linked to the masses of people, especially the advanced sections,**
7 **but is also able to lead them forward toward revolution?**

8 **4. Should it be run according to democratic centralist principles?**

9 **Note: In the history of the ICM, democratic centralism has been based on the**
10 **Marxist theory of knowledge: Democracy allows the members of the**
11 **organization to learn about the objective situation and the views of the**
12 **masses of people. Through various levels of leadership, the organization**
13 **concentrates this knowledge, and then formulates political positions and**
14 **policies to advance the revolutionary struggle. Centralism comes into play as**
15 **the organization carries out this line and policies in a unified manner. The**
16 **results of the organization's practice are then summed up by the membership**
17 **as described above. In addition, the democratic aspect generally means that**
18 **the members choose their leadership on a regular basis.**

19 **Why have nearly all "democratic centralist" organizations and parties ended**
20 **up becoming mainly or exclusively centralist? Should individual members or**
21 **groupings be permitted to dissent from a political line or position? Should**
22 **factions (organized dissenting groups that involve different party units) be**
23 **allowed? If so, how would they affect maintaining overall security and the**
24 **ability of the organization to implement unified line and policies?**

25 **5. How should leaders within the organization be chosen or removed?**

26 **Should members elect the next highest levels of leadership, or directly elect all**
27 **leading bodies? How often should elections be held? How, and under what**
28 **conditions, can leaders be removed? Once leadership bodies have been**
29 **constituted, should lower bodies be subordinate to**
30 **(have to follow directions from) higher bodies?**

1 **How does an organization prevent its leaders from being corrupted –**
2 **politically, morally or financially – by being in a position of power over**
3 **others? How does it keep leaders accountable to the membership? How does**
4 **the organization promote the development of collective leadership and new**
5 **leaders in an ongoing way? Rotation, “term limits”?**

6 **6. Is there a need for revolutionary organizations for each oppressed nation**
7 **or nationality in the U.S.–African-Americans, Chicanos/Mexicanos, Puerto**
8 **Ricans, Asian Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, etc.?**

9 **Is there a need for mass organizations to build struggle among these**
10 **oppressed nationalities? What is the relationship between these two**
11 **forms of organization? What is the relationship between multinational**
12 **revolutionary organizations and nationality-based mass orgs?**

13 **7. In a multinational rev. organization, what should be the composition by**
14 **nationality and gender of the organization, and of its leadership bodies?**

15 **How is this related to the different social bases of support for this**
16 **organization? How can we make sure that people of color and women do not**
17 **feel ‘swallowed up’ in a mainly white or male group, with their experiences**
18 **and opinions not fully listened to? Will working in a multinational**
19 **organization hurt, or enhance, a member’s ability to lead struggles in his or**
20 **her own**
21 **oppressed community?**

22 **8. Is the eventual development of one leading multinational revolutionary**
23 **organization or party a requirement for a successful socialist revolution in**
24 **the U.S.?**

25 **Can the necessary political/military alliances and coordination be achieved**
26 **among multiple organizations? (Not sure how to put this–How does this**
27 **relate to the parallel development of revolutionary nationalist and**
28 **multinational rev. forces?)**

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Due to the fact that the character of revolutionary organizations that we build now greatly influences what kind of society we build after the revolutionary seizure of power, our questions must also include the period of building a socialist society:

- 1. Will we need a centralized state apparatus, decentralized institutions (political, economic and military), or a combination of the two? How do we balance the ways we would want to live with the continuing existence of major inequalities and capitalist relations in the new society, and the ongoing hostility of the imperialist-dominated world?**
- 2. What should be the role of elections in choosing leadership bodies under socialism—in workplaces, communities, schools, and in society generally?**
- 3. Should the party or parties that led the revolution have an institutionalized hold (or monopoly) on political power?**
- 4. How can the development of “capitalist roaders” (bourgeois elements) in the leading parties and government be combatted? How can the restoration of capitalism that took place in the Soviet Union and China be prevented?**