

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE END OF THE ANTI-CIA COALITION

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On April 11, 1976, the Anti-CIA Coalition voted to dissolve itself. In its dissolution, the Anti-CIA Coalition joins the Socialist Forum and other now defunct ad hoc working groups which have been hastily constituted over the years as vehicles for radical action and education. The milieu remains while the assemblies of activists come and go. In the absence of strategic organization, the lessons accumulated from the sacrifices and labor of activists are often left behind with the ad hoc organizations which served to develop the group's practice.

Strategically, there were few activists who thought that the Anti-CIA Coalition should continue to serve as the central Left organization at UCSD. The dissolution of the Coalition,

however, was a tactical defeat for all activists, coming as it did two weeks before a Coalition sponsored statewide conference and prior to the verdict and sentencing of ten members of the Coalition being disciplined for their role in a Coalition demonstration.

We can turn such a tactical defeat into an ~~as yet unrealized strategic victory~~ ^{advantage:} the building of a massive socialist student movement. But first we must be willing to critically analyze the theory and practice of the Anti-CIA Coalition (ACC), to resolutely evaluate our ~~victories and defeats, and to~~ ^{strengths and weaknesses, and to} continue the struggle on the campus.

The movement at UCSD and on the campuses will continue to grow. The successes of the ACC have created the preconditions for ~~the blooming of~~ an even more massive movement next year. While there are some on the campuses who challenge the validity of a strong student movement on its "non-proletarian" merits, there are hundreds of thousands of others whose thinking may be less advanced in Marxology yet whose lives are lived in closer contact with reality than those whose myopic dogmatism blinds them to the concrete victories of the radical student movement of the 1960's and to the growing consciousness and possibilities of the 1970's.*

The Anti-CIA Coalition dissolved because of political differences. Certainly there were personal problems in our group. There are ego conflicts and personality problems in all function-

*The validity of building a student movement was a major debate within the ACC. For a fuller explanation, see the student movement document submitted to the statewide conference by members of the ACC Conference Action Committee, attached to the back of this.

ing groups -- explicitly political or not. But we would not be true to a commitment to politics in command if we do not attempt to define and analyze the political problems raised by our practice. This paper attempts to take an initial step forward in a critical evaluation of the Anti-CIA Coalition. Specifically, I will focus on two tendencies of the ACC--economistic and anti-organizational ones--^{which I see as} having laid the groundwork for the Coalition's dissolution and in immobilizing our political effectiveness in the months prior to our demise.

POLITICS IN COMMAND

The proposal to dissolve the Anti-CIA Coalition amounted to abandoning a key political front--anti-CIA work--in favor of the economic struggle and "issues of everyday life" (as if the CIA and imperialism are not day to day issues for the vast majority of the international working class). According to the spokesperson of the Labor Collective who presented the proposal for immediate dissolution: In the ACC there is not political discussion of "concrete, material conditions of life..." struggles "more important" than anti-CIA work.

According to this view, the primary focus of socialist work at UCSD today should be in support of ^{the} GSU, AFSCME and other trade union struggles, on or off campus. Trade union work is certainly compatible with anti-CIA work. The fight for unions is one vehicle through which workers can win short-run gains which make

survival easier. But to let such short-run gains hold a position of central importance for the Left and to abandon the ~~anti-imperialist~~ ^{political} front amounts to economism pure and simple. The Left has been continually plagued by this tendency. In What Is To Be Done, one of Lenin's polemics with economists, he presents a clear definition of what the tendency consists of:

"...the fundamental political tendency of Economism--let the workers carry on the economic struggle (it would be more correct to say the trade-union struggle, because the latter also embraces specifically working class politics) and let the Marxist intelligentsia merge with the liberals for the political 'struggle.'"1

There is no point in positing an absolute primacy of anti-imperialist work over or above trade union work. Yet ~~if the essence of~~ the Labor Collective's one-sided position becomes clear when it is known that AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees), the international union chosen to represent the GSU, has ties to the CIA. According to Philip Agee, former CIA agent turned socialist, who told all in his CIA Diary:

A fourth CIA approach to labour operations is through the International Trade Secretariats (ITS), which represents the interests of workers in a particular industry as opposed to the national centres that unite workers of different industries... Very often the CIA agents in an ITS are the American labour leaders who represent the US affiliate of the ITS, since the ITS would usually receive its principal support from the pertinent US industrial union. Thus the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees serves as a channel for CIA operations in the Public Service International, which is the ITS for government employees headquartered in London. And the Retail Clerks International Association, which is the US union of white collar employees, gives access to the International Federation of Clerical and Technical Employees, which is the white collar ITS. Similarly, the Communications Workers of America is used to control the Post, Telegraph and Telephone Workers International which is the ITS for communications workers.²

Among other projects, the AFSCME international was used by the CIA as a decisive force in ousting Marxist Prime Minister Cheddi Jagan of British Guiana in 1963.³

The precise nature of CIA influence in the trade unions is quite revealing. In describing a course on CIA work in labor, Agee writes:

...Overall the course emphasized that Agency labour operations must seek to develop trade unions in underdeveloped countries that will focus on economic issues and stay away from politics and the ideology of class struggle. This is the Gompers tradition of American trade unionism...⁴

It would be too crude from these quotes to mechanically equate economism and the CIA. Many sincere activists have fallen into the economist mire. Yet while the CIA is seen as the enemy of progressive people, there is comparatively little consciousness among progressives which condemns economism. The divisive effects of economism on working class solidarity coupled with Agee's revelations make it imperative for progressive people who work within AFSCME's trade union struggles to simultaneously challenge the pro-imperialistic activities of the AFSCME international.

International capitalism maintains itself through dividing the working people of the world. The primary dividing line today is along racial grounds. Forging unity of the international proletariat first requires overcoming the racism of the privileged sectors of workers in the metropolises. By uniting against the CIA, we take an important step in forging political unity based on the needs of the most oppressed sectors of the international proletariat, the workers of Third World countries dominated by US imperialism. In this context then, overcoming economism is a precondition for developing a strategy which will unite people internationally against the oppressive structure of imperialism.

In any "mother country" of imperialism, economism dominates to some extent in the working class struggle. As the benefits for workers in the US continue to decline, the struggle against economism will be aggravated. Upon that moment, the economic and political struggles of the working class will be united into one. The terms of the unity will not be around trade-unionism alone, but around revolutionary socialism and the total needs of all people.

The task of socialist theory and practice is to develop modes of education and agitation which serve to emphasize the need for a qualitative leap from the present socio-economic reality to a new and totally different one. Economism ~~serves to~~ gives the illusion that real change can come simply through piece by piece reform of the present structures. Since the beginning of the socialist movement, such trends have existed within it. The struggle against economism is an essential aspect of building a socialist movement and not simply a reformist one.

BUILD STRATEGIC ORGANIZATION

At the same time as we criticize the tendency toward economism, there are other lessons we should draw from the Anti-GIA Coalition. The failure of the ACC to continue to grow should help us to see the necessity for a more systematic approach to creating organization and the need to counter anti-organiza-

tional tendencies. There are some in the ACC who still believe that organization can be created spontaneously to fulfill needs for action and education in any given context. The origins of the ACC are of this nature. We created the ACC to deal with newly discovered connections between the CIA and the University of California. As time progressed and our work against the CIA became increasingly successful, we attempted to define ourselves as an ongoing multi-issue organization. However, our failure in the ACC should provide a valuable lesson: ongoing organization ~~does not~~ ^{cannot be kept} ~~spontaneously~~ ^{within the limits of spontaneity} nor does it develop out of a single issue coalition. Our attempts to accomplish this improbability (perhaps even this impossibility) may have accounted for much of the difficulties within the Coalition.

An ongoing organization could not grow organically from a spontaneously created coalition. A bird cannot hatch from a rock even if the rock appears to be an egg. Ongoing organization should be consciously and proactively created for itself. Our failures in the ACC demonstrate clearly the need for strategic organization which can plan ~~actions~~ for and create a context within which such tactical groups as the ACC can flourish. Without strategic organization, our ad hoc groups tend to degenerate into pure reaction against the latest barbarism of imperialism, or become suspended in the twilight zone between organization and coalition.

There are inherent limitations to any coalition, let alone one which emerges in lieu of any coherent organization. The ACC

vacillated between a self-conception as a coalition or an ongoing socialist organization. As a result, people new to politics were estranged from the theoretical discussion of the Leftists. The Leftists, caught within the non-structure of the ACC, were unable to develop modes of working together which were consciously created to facilitate any ongoing practice.

In many ways, the ACC failed to take advantage of situations we helped to create. Because so much of the group's time was spent in meetings, we could not locate our energies to stimulate political discussions about the CIA with large numbers of students. In the absence of systematic organization, not only were we unable to coherently reach the university community at large, but we were unable to develop ourselves qualitatively. Moreover, our lack of strategic organization could mean that the lessons derived from the experiences of groups like the ACC and the Socialist Forum are lost in ^{our} ~~the~~ day-to-day routines, rather than being scientifically incorporated into the hearts and minds of those who will continue the struggle over the years.

Another ~~one~~ consequence of the ambiguous structure of the ACC was our inability to ~~create~~ and develop leadership among ourselves. New Left tendencies, like the fear of hierarchical organization, caused the ACC to bend over backwards to give each member equal weight in developing policy and in making decisions. As a result we became dependent upon anarchic factors for the development of our practice. ^{For instance, those} ~~such as~~ who happened to show up for a given meeting or who had the perseverance to last through our six and seven hour marathons ^{constituted decision-making bodies.} The slogan "from each according to their ability and to each according to their work" became redefined with respect to the ACC as "from each according to the lowest common denominator..."

Our future modes of working together should take into account the various levels of commitment people are willing to make. We should encourage, rather than discourage, those of us who want to take initiative. We can all recognize that leadership is a

necessity for the building of ongoing organization.

A FEW WORDS ON CRITICISM AND SELF-CRITICISM

The Anti-CIA Coalition (ACC) was plagued with problems of a personal nature--some of which we may attribute to the work of as yet undiscovered agents within the Coalition* but much of which we owe to our reality: living on the higher side of the world's most brutal system of exploitation and oppression, modern imperialism. Our inner personality traits, we as people, have been transformed into instruments of domination by our socio-economic system. Being dominated and manipulated at all levels of the capitalist reality, we cannot be free overnight. Rather, in the process of constructing a new reality, we must strive to change ourselves as people as well. Our failure to establish a principled process of criticism and self-criticism in the ACC gave rise to much individualism and degenerate, behind the back shuck and jive, sexism, missed communication, and haphazard group process. Our future efforts at organization should reflect a higher understanding of the need for ~~structured feedback~~ ^{collective reflection} and help in guiding each other on a personal and especially a political level.

*Some of us are considering a Freedom of Information Act request to determine what, if any, CIA involvement or surveillance was done to members of the ACC. If you are interested in participating you are welcome to join in the request.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE ANTI-CIA COALITION

It would be a mistake for me to finish without emphasizing the accomplishments of the ACC. At a time when the movement in the US is hardly visible, we, students at UCSD, have sparked a renewal of the anti-imperialist struggle on the campuses. In the best traditions of the 30's and the 60's, we have acted in solidarity with ~~workers~~^{people} throughout the world in struggle against a common enemy.

Our actions at UCSD received international and national publicity, thereby communicating our militant solidarity to millions of supporters. Locally, even the combined stupification of the San Diego Union and the UCSD Triton Times has helped us to raise the moral and political questions of CIA involvement at UCSD.

The statewide conference which many of us from the ACC followed through on has created the seeds of at least a communication network and possibly an organization for radical students in the Western US. A Provisional Statewide Organizing Committee (PSOC) emerged from the conference to continue to build the network uniting various campuses.

Perhaps the most important changes we will have begun to make reside in the personal and political growth of each of us who worked in the ACC. In trying to deal with the issues raised by our practice, we came to grips with the fundamental questions of our time--not just of what the world is but how we can change it to become human. At this moment, it may appear that we have

not been successful, yet the effects of our labor have yet to completely unfold.

The reality of our ~~victories are~~ ^{success is} contained in the future activities we engage in ourselves and in the actions of large numbers of people we have helped to move. If nothing else we have begun to awaken the students at UCSD. Our work this year has created the preconditions for an even more massive student movement next year.

We are entering a period of explosive possibilities. As US imperialism continues to decline and as liberation movements in the Third World maintain their ascendent role, the fascist tendencies in the US will become stronger. The vast majority of people here are looking for answers to the many questions raised by the changes of the last decade. Each of us should seriously examine the possibilities of our lives, the need for our united actions. We should strive to build a movement which can transcend our personal shortcomings ^{and} through our united efforts ~~to~~ remold an oppressive social reality into a liberating one.

NOTES

1. Lenin, What Is To Be Done?, NY:International Publishers, 1973. P 19.
2. Agee, Philip, CIA Diary, ~~NY~~, Stonehill, 1975 (orig. hardcover ed.) p 76.
3. Ibid., p 293
4. Ibid., p 135
5. Ibid., p 75