

**The THEORY and  
PRACTICE of**

**ARMED  
STRUGGLE**

**In the  
NORTHWEST**

**By Ed Mead**

## Preface

The theory and practice of armed struggle was written just a month after my arrest for a George Jackson Brigade bank robbery and during a period of intense rejection by Seattle's left. The article reflects the history and political development of the group as it existed at that time. It was written to answer some of the criticisms the left was using to rationalize its lack of support for Brigade members who had been captured. Because it was written during a period of general confusion and so close to the events being discussed, it does not possess the depth or breadth of something written from the comfortable perspective of hindsight. It has been suggested that I should write a complete history of the George Jackson Brigade, one that does not stop with my arrest but goes on to examine the years of subsequent practice and theory. I've considered this and rejected the idea. First of all, I was not a part of the group during those later years and thus could not write about them with any degree of accuracy. Secondly, I simply do not have the time to devote to something that would be a book length subject matter -- the day-to-day demands of the struggle require too much energy for such a difficult project. Thirdly, I do not think that the "Theory and Practice" article has received the attention from the left it warrants. Accordingly, I have rewritten the original document and in the process added some additional elements of theory and omitted the section on revolutionary culture.

In order that the general thrust of the segment on culture not be lost I'll give some brief quotes from parts of it. These will communicate the tone and overall direction this writer advocated when the original article was written:

It would be idealistic to think these cultural changes will come about smoothly, without hard feelings and perhaps even some violence. Before things can come together they must come apart. Splits are encouraged on all levels. Divided couples, families and groups by sex. Combat liberalism. Strive for ideological clarity. Expose internal and external weaknesses. Refine quality and reject quantity, prefer depth to superficiality....

As things come together (or as they go apart), women and men should drift toward their respective communities. Women children with women and men children with men. During this process a fierce internal struggle should be waged around heterosexual chauvinism and the power relationships between children and adults. Exploration of the role of sex as a means of achieving these ends should not be excluded. Our schools should be hidden from the eyes of the state, as should a substantial section of each community....

It should be pointed out that what is advocated is not separatism. The sexual communities would be a part of a single organization. The two communities would work and struggle together toward the implementation of a common politic. They would mourn defeat and celebrate victories together....

In the five years since the writing of the above words very little has changed. The respective communities have grown somewhat stronger in some respects, but in others they are more atomized than ever. The men's community has carried "culture" to the extreme of petit bourgeois life-stylism,

and

liberalism in practice and theory have become the norm in both communities. The radicals of yesterday are the props of the system today. They are the system's "loyal opposition." The difference between them and the left wing of the bourgeois is one of form rather than substance. Abbie Hoffman is the Eldridge Cleaver of the white left and the clearest example of the bankruptcy of a non-Marxist approach to revolution.

While I wrote about these other things in early 1976, the main thrust of my article has to do with the place of revolutionary violence in the U.S. today. A lot of people who pose as revolutionaries are against political violence as a matter of principle, these are the pacifist types who are so out of touch with reality that they cannot see the violence being used against poor and oppressed peoples by the state as anything other than a policy that only need be changed. The pacifists support the system of imperialism, but would like it to be more humane. Others, like the dogmatist and mechanical Marxist-Leninists, see the need for revolutionary violence at some future date, but believe it will emerge with the development of the mass movement just prior to actual insurrection by the working class. They do not see and therefore cannot appreciate the need for a hidden infrastructure capable of exercising selective forms of armed work. For them it is either full insurrection or nothing. The possibility that they may have to go underground at some point is a thought beyond their comprehension, that's how deeply these "revolutionaries" are locked into bourgeois legality. In fact, like the ruling class, they see all forms of armed struggle as "terrorism." The position outlined in the article on the subject is that revolutionary violence will help to build the aboveground movement, in addition to other positive effects it can have, and thus it should be given at least critical support by the rest of the left.

People are of course free to accept or reject the political conclusions reached in the "Theory and Practice" article until such time as they are fully tested in practice on American soil. They cannot, however, ignore the reality of the high level of violence within the nation's poor communities. They cannot ignore the state's hired goons terrorizing the ghettos or the high levels of poor on poor crime. At least us poor people can't ignore it because we are its victims.

So while the G.J.B. grew out of the prison struggle in the Northwest, it is not just the desperate and fearful conditions on the inside that dictate the need for some measure of organized self-defense. Millions of people on the streets live in a justified fear and insecurity. They not only have to worry about a police bullet in the back, but of being raped, robbed, or their houses burgled by the confused victims of the system. The point I am trying to make is that the violence is already there. The question is not whether there should be violence but rather how to constructively direct the existing violence of the oppressed. The need is not to debate sterile dogmas as much as it is to discover concrete ways in which the heretofore internalized anger of the oppressed can be organized and given conscious expression. The G.J.B. was a step in the process of developing an alternative to the present levels of anti-working class and therefore self-destructive behavior.

Franz Fanon, in his book Wretched of the Earth, discusses the contradictions involved with the internally directed violence of the oppressed in pre-revolutionary Algeria. He describes how the violence there grew from intra-tribal to inter-tribal, and then into an anti-imperialist struggle that resulted in the successful eviction of the French colonists from their soil. From what I remember, he argued that these internal forms of violence were not necessarily a bad thing in that it taught the people how to fight and tended to cleanse them in the process. I disagree. It seems to me that if oppressed people need the confidence that comes from experience in fighting and the cleansing process that supposedly results from participating in violence, then that experience and cleansing should be the result of fighting the class and national enemy rather than each other. The G.J.B. had the potential of becoming a vehicle for providing fighting experience and giving a constructive alternative to the oppressed. In the absence of such an alternative the prisoners murder each other at increasing rates and the communities remain increasingly victimized by both class forces. This might seem as if it is approaching the problem from the standpoint of the individual faced with survival choices, as opposed to the working class masses, but the need for armed units is actually dictated by the objective needs of the struggle as a whole.

While the theory of armed struggle will be dealt with in the main body of this document, there are a few points I would like to make that were not addressed or carefully examined when it was originally drafted. First of all, the Brigade did not see itself as a small group of revolutionaries trying to carry out an offensive against the bourgeois state in isolation from the masses, who would be

relegated to secondary roles of passive spectators or playing second fiddle to the armed front. The object, which is made clear in the main text, was to help build genuine working class organization by combining strikes with ongoing armed resistance tactics (not unlike the IRA Provos). The group's position then, and the line I currently advocate, is that an armed offensive is not the order of the day. The exploited masses are still very much on the defensive, and thus it would be a tactical folly to launch an all out offensive in isolation from the above-ground movement (the underground forces are also withdrawn at this point). What is on the order of the day, however, is building the capacity for armed self-defense and vigorous counter measures against fascist terror -- such as that in Greensboro. This would be combined with systematic propaganda and agitation to combat the ongoing offensive of the bourgeois and prepare the people for the great class battles to come.

In the main text I argue that: "Now is the time to initiate offensive struggle against the class enemy, to start the process of contending for power." I also characterized the enemy as being on the "defensive." At that time U.S. imperialism was on the international defensive, having just been beaten out of Viet Nam and under heavy attack in Africa and the Middle East. On the home front it was actually shifting from the defensive to the offensive. Even so, now is the time to initiate some modest offensive probes. The old axiom that the best defense is a good offense is true. It is time to start contending for some measure of power. There are of course times for strictly defensive forms of work, such as when fascism has clearly gained the upper hand over the working class movement, but this is not such a period. Another point in need of clarification is that toward the end, when I talk about the need to launch class war politics, I do not mean that people should drop what they are doing and go on a shooting spree, aimed at overthrowing the government, but rather that the aboveground should adopt a more determined attitude in its approach to organizing. My purpose was to foster militancy and aggressiveness in day-to-day political work, a message that may have been obscured by some of the rhetoric I employed.

Finally, the reader might be interested to note that the attitude of the left in the Northwest has not changed much in the five years since the article was written. The community press there still refuses to print any of my propaganda, etc. When it appeared as if most of the Brigade members were locked up and the organization safely dead, there was some talk about the importance of armed work, but since John's escape from Lompoc federal prison, folks have become more cautious. Some people on the left think John and anyone with him should go live in

the suburbs and not do any more actions. They believe that armed actions are counterproductive. Others are able to appreciate the role of armed forms of struggle, as least in their verbiage, but want the remnants of the group to practice it in some other area. They say there is "too much heat in the Northwest." Both arguments are but different sides of the same liberal coin. Until the left in that area can field and sustain an armed unit, under whatever conditions of control are necessary, serious organizing will be impaired and the movement cannot mature. The remnants of the G.J.B. should be reinforced or a similar group established. The issue is not how much "heat" there is. It is, rather, how to build an infrastructure capable of beating the heat. Mistakes will of course be made -- that's how we learn things. Nothing truly positive is achieved without sacrifice.

My purpose has been to foster discussion around the subject of armed struggle, and to do so from within the context of the actual practice of one group who was doing it. If people give the matter some serious consideration, I'll be somewhat satisfied. If they move to implement the lessons of the Brigade, both the positive and negative, I'll feel much better about the future. Another war looms in the not too distant future. The principle of "revolutionary defeatism" urged by Lenin dictates that we not only advocate for the defeat of U.S. imperialism and the victory of the U.S.S.R., but that we fight for it as well. We must be prepared to fight on all levels, distasteful as that prospect might presently seem.

Love and struggle,

Ed Mead  
Box B 41627  
Florence, AZ 85232

### The Theory and Practice of Armed Struggle in the Northwest

In early 1974 the arrest of Patty Hearst by the Symbionese Liberation Army brought the question of revolutionary violence to a sleeping left. Patricia's seizure was in response to a the state's arrest of two members of the S.L.A. who, like the young Hearst, were guilty of nothing but association. Subsequent negotiations resulted in a massive food give-away that not only exposed the degree of poverty in Southern California, but mobilized tens of thousands of angry poor people into the streets as well. As events then proved, the aboveground left was not prepared to direct or organize these masses of people and thus the full potential of the action never realized. In fact, the left uniformly denounced the group and objectively aided the enemy by further isolating them. The state promptly exploited the vulnerability created by the S.L.A.'s isolation from the progressive community. The result is now referred to as the Compton massacre.<sup>1</sup>

The student of history will remember how the opportunists of the Second International cloaked their political treachery in the language of Marxism. The classics of dialectical and historical materialism teach us that history develops in spirals, repeating itself on higher and higher levels. The early opportunists treated Marxism as a sacred dogma, as the final word (rather than the beginning of a rich political tradition) and hence denied that Lenin enriched Marxist theory. The modern version of this form of opportunism is not so different from its earlier counterpart, only today it is Marxism-Leninism that has become the sacred and unchanging dogma.

Just as their earlier counterparts used the name of Marxism to rationalize their support of the bourgeoisie, the opportunists of today side with their respective ruling classes in the name of Marxism-Leninism. Yesterday, respected Marxists such as Plekhanov were writing articles calling Lenin an anarchist and his less sophisticated contemporaries were fond of branding him as a foreign agent. Today respected Marxist-Leninists write articles calling those advocating the building of an armed infrastructure anarchists and, as in the case of the S.L.A., the less sophisticated brand them as C.I.A. agents.<sup>2</sup> It was this "respected" left that sided with their ruling class in its attack on the Symbionese Liberation Army. The constraints imposed as a result of their rigid adherence to an unchanging dogma prevented the "communists" from adopting a position of critical but unconditional defense of the S.L.A.

Contrary to the belief popular in many political circles, however, significant theoretical contributions have been made since Lenin in the so-called third world countries. Chief among these, and one the left will have to address itself to before the question of illegal forms of struggle can be adequately resolved, is the enrichment of Marxism-Leninism by Ho Chi Minh. As General Vo Nguyen Giap points out in The Military Art of People's War:

The practice of revolutionary struggle in our country in new historical conditions has made an original contribution to Marxist-Leninist theory on revolutionary armed struggle, according to which revolutionary struggle is a dialectic combination of political struggle and armed struggle.... This is what we mean when we say that the people's uprising and the people's war in our country are new developments in the conception of revolutionary violence. [pp. 169-170]

In other words, the armed struggle in Viet Nam was to be developed on the basis of the political struggle being brought to a higher level, with both forms of struggle developing simultaneously and stimulating each other--the armed struggle was to give the political struggle a stronger impulse.

In the early days, when Uncle Ho made the decision to prepare for armed struggle, the Viet Nameese party did not have a single inch of free territory. Their first guerilla units, made up of politically conscious people, concentrated on armed propaganda rather than military activities. Ho had just returned from China in December of 1944 when he ordered the creation of the Puyen Pruyen Giai Phong Quan (Armed Propaganda Detachment) under Giap's command. This detachment "had the task of using armed struggle to mobilize and arouse the population, but (their) guiding principle was to consist in attaching more importance to political activities, to propaganda, than to armed attack." [Ibid., p. 67] In other words, these units were to lay somewhere between political and military organizations. Their progress was not to be measured according to customary battle statistics or in terrain gained and held, but in the persistence of the revolutionary forces--in their sheer capacity to survive over time.

The armed units were conscious of their weaknesses against the enemy's power, and thus patiently worked at creating the conditions for victory. With the strategy of long term resistance, exalting the principle of being self-supporting, they gradually augmented their forces while eating away at those of the enemy. They turned their weakness into power; slowly altering the balance of forces, by accumulating thousands of small victories in order to turn them into a great success, and by unceasingly intensifying



and extending guerrilla activities. In the fighting they went from a single unit, gradually growing into independent companies operating separately, to mobile battalions, then from battalions to regiments and divisions.<sup>3</sup>

The point we are trying to make is that progressive peoples in the U.S. must evaluate the contribution to revolutionary theory made by Uncle Ho--the combination of the political and the armed struggle--in light of the concrete conditions as they exist in North America today. This is accomplished not by mechanical imitation of the Viet Nam experience, but through the creative building and support of an armed struggle that will enable the masses to bring their political authority into play. Before this can happen, however, U.S. Communists must recognize armed struggle as a legitimate form of revolutionary activity--deserving at least critical support. In short, the dialectical process of evolving revolutionary violence, the dynamics of continuing the political struggle, must receive more theoretical and practical attention.

At present there are many communist parties in the United States and more of them in the process of formation. Some parties are organized around their devotion to revolutionary heroes; the Socialist Workers Party and other likes them are followers of Trotsky; many groups, like Youth for Stalin, are oriented toward Stalin; some, such as the Revolutionary Communist Party, are devotees of Mao Tse Tung. Many parties are devoted to countries rather than outstanding individuals; the Communist Party U.S.A. is a flunky of the U.S.S.R.; the Communist Party (M-L) is a flunky of China; and the Communist Party U.S.A. (M-L) trails after socialist Albania. Regardless of their respective differences, they all have one thing in common with each other; they abhor illegal forms of struggle. The S.W.P., for example, recently had its Chicago office firebombed by an anti-communist group and one of their members murdered shortly thereafter. Lacking the willingness and the capacity to defend themselves, they ran into the arms of the bourgeois repressive apparatus they are supposedly trying to overthrow and asked for police protection.

As the course of events unfold it may come to pass that an existing party or a future one will assume leadership of the overall movement; both its aboveground and underground components. But revolutions happen without a party in certain situations; Cuba, Ethiopia, Nicaragua and Korea are examples of this phenomenon. Whether there is a party or not, armed groups cannot be associated with them in an open way without jeo-

pardizing their ability to conduct legal forms of political struggle. Rather than armed units with direct ties to communist parties, there needs to be independent experimentation in various aspects of illegal work. The S.L.A. was one such experiment, the George Jackson Brigade is another. Each learns from the mistakes of predecessors, picking up the crimson banner and again carrying it forward. From the process will eventually emerge units capable of surviving the hunt and growing into a central aspect of the political force of poor and working people in the U.S.<sup>4</sup>

This then was the general thinking of a small group of Seattle militants who, about a year after the Compton Massacre, decided the primary task was to start preparing for the armed aspects of the political struggle. Accordingly, they set about the work of building what they felt to be the minimum clandestine infrastructure necessary to launch a series of military probes. What had until this point been passing itself off as the non-revisionist left was in actuality little more than a verbal critique of reformism and revisionism. Progressive elements within the left repeatedly emphasized that without armed struggle there could be no victory, but they lacked a practice conforming to their lofty theoretical positions. Those who wanted to rectify this situation were confronted with the difficult task of answering in practice the questions of organizational form, base, the shape the conflict would take, and coordination with the mass movement. The level of sustainable struggle was determined by critically analyzing the actions of the S.L.A. and the practice of similar groups. It was felt the S.L.A. had gone too far too fast, without taking the time to build and secure its rear and base area.

The then existing stage of revolutionary development seemed to coincide with the teachings of George Jackson:

In the opening stages of conflict, before a unified left can be established, before people have accepted the inevitability of war, before we are militarily able to organize massive violence, we must depend on limited, selective violence tied to exact political purposes.

The group adopted the name of the George Jackson Brigade; a brigade being a unit organized for a specific purpose and, in a semi-military sense, one having supply, intelligence, and combat sections. The "exact political purposes" were seen as defense of the aboveground left; the judicious application of people's justice; military support for mass actions; retaliation to extreme manifestations of fascist violence; weakening the bour-

geois state by inflicting material damage in vital areas; and conducting armed propaganda. People also felt armed actions would help to polarize the left--that direct action would contribute to the building of revolutionary organization.<sup>5</sup>

Theoretical considerations alone were not what lead to the formation of the Brigade, nor was the group's development the simple product of the deepening political and economic crisis of monopoly capitalism. While revolutionary theory and the growing international retreat of U.S. imperialism were important considerations, the key factors were the collective experience gained from long years of purely mass agitation and organizing, and the crying need for extra-legal means to deal with the criminal abuse of political prisoners inside the state's penitentiary. The members of the Brigade are mostly of working class origin, with light lumpen and petty bourgeois elements. Mao taught that the lumpen proletariat are "(b)rave fighters but apt to be destructive, they can become a revolutionary force if given proper guidance."<sup>6</sup> In its initial stages the group had to expel about half of this element for rejecting political guidance, the remainder were indeed brave fighters.<sup>7</sup> The petty bourgeois elements contributed valuable knowledge and tended to balance the lumpen tendency toward adventurism with their caution. Nearly every member had spent years working with prisoners, most were active in the anti-war movement and some had done workplace organizing. The first five members of the Brigade had a combined experience of community and related organizing of about 25 years. It was this experience, as well as a lot of other factors, which verified that words alone are ineffective in achieving even modest reforms.<sup>8</sup>

Of course it could be argued that huge masses of people can accomplish what small groups cannot, as in the case of the ongoing revolution in Iran. But this argument would fail as the revolution in Iran was preceded by nine years of armed struggle against the Shah. Now it would indeed be nice if communists could call on the overwhelming masses for direct action, but this is not likely to be an option anytime soon. Meanwhile, it is necessary to organize some small defenses in an effort to resist some of the state's more flagrant abuses.

Anyway, the initial G.J.B. folks were no different than anyone else; they had the same doubts, fears and uncertainties as their aboveground counterparts. The essential difference was that it became clear to the former that the deteriorating status quo would not change by following reformists into a never ending series of dead end struggles. If one but

set aside the rhetoric of these aboveground leaders and looked at their political practice over the years, it would be all but indistinguishable from that of the left opposition wing of the ruling class. In other words, the objective effect of their work as to reform imperialism.

The immediate suffering of the people made continuing such ineffective methods of work an act of opportunism. For this writer the last straw was the great hollow nose bullet struggle, in which the political community united in an effort to slow the murder of unarmed black youth by police through a protest of the use of what we might just as well call dum-dum bullets. The success or failure of this struggle turned on a vote of the city council rather than the determined will of the people. One measure of a people's determination is their willingness to use violence. Given the extreme suffering of the black community and the plight of advanced prisoners, it was decided that this determination should be promptly expressed. The city council had approved the use of killer bullets by police; the time for talking was over.<sup>9</sup>

In late 1974 and early 1975 there was an upsurge in the unity and activity of Seattle's left community. When the hollow nose bullet struggle failed, it was followed a few months later with the struggle of the United Construction Workers Association against the contractors for more black jobs. During this period most of Seattle's political community participated in a series of militant demonstrations against the contractors. These demonstrations were conducted at construction sites in the black community and were the most determined protests conducted since the anti-war movement. Many of the demonstrators wore ski-masks or otherwise covered their faces while huge contingents of riot police tried to keep them off the work sites. Numerous activists were arrested and charged with the destruction of property at construction sites during the escalating course of the struggle. It was at this point that the G.J.B. quietly entered the conflict in support of the U.C.W.A.

The members of the Brigade were critical of the U.C.W.A.'s demand for black jobs at the expense of white workers, feeling that pushing whites off the job to make room for blacks was divisive and tended to foster racism. (In retrospect the group would probably not make the same criticism if the events were happening today, inasmuch as the struggle against the Bakke and Weber cases have clarified the basis in bourgeois ideology of such thinking. At that point, however, the G.J.B. did not have any black members or, for that matter, even a name. In any case, the criticism was not a strongly

felt one.) At the height of the struggle the main offices of one of the offending contractors were attacked one night at about midnight and completely destroyed by G.J.B. firebombs. The general reaction of the political community, none of whom knew the identity of the attackers, was for the most part positive. A brief communique was written but not widely circulated. It contained a mild criticism of the U.C.W.A.'s politics and was privately distributed to selected sections of the left.

Months later, just prior to the trials of those charged with the destruction of property during the protests, the Brigade struck another blow in support of the left. One night, Brigade members put massive quantities of sand into the oil and fuel tanks of several pieces of heavy equipment belonging to the racist contractors. At the same time they drained the gas from the saddle-tanks of a large truck with an attached lowboy trailer, on which the blade of a D-6 Cat was resting, and lit the contents on fire. The truck and trailer were totally ruined and the Cat parked next to it was heavily damaged. A few days later the criminal charges against the protesters were dismissed when the complaining contractor refused to testify against them. He told reporters his refusal was based upon the tens of thousands of dollars in damage suffered just days before, saying the damage caused by the charged protesters was nothing in comparison to recent acts, and stated that he did not want any more trouble.

No communique was issued for the above acts as the medium was the message. The G.J.B. actions described above are concrete examples of using armed means to achieve "exact political purposes." The first illustrates the application of illegal means to complement the militant struggles of those doing aboveground organizing. The second is a successful example of what is meant by the term "defending the left." Lastly, regardless of the absence of substance of the G.J.B.'s criticism, the series of illegal acts in connection with the U.C.W.A. struggle serves as a lesson in how criticism should be conducted from within the context of general support.

As mentioned earlier, an important factor in the formation of the Brigade was the collective experience of those doing purely mass work--especially prisoner support work. This writer was an ex-prisoner who had taken legal forms of struggle to the limit without being able to bridge the state's corrections bureaucracy and, having been to Attica to help defend the brothers who survived the massacre and then faced more charges, could clearly see the huge difference the existence of a combat unit would have had on Rockefeller's decision to send troops against unarmed prisoners.

The S.L.A. showed the direction dedicated people must move; the actions of the prisoners at Walla Walla gave the matter some urgency. On December 31, 1974, prisoners at the Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla seized the recreation department, kitchen, hospital and Eight Wing, holding their 13 hostages in the last two areas. The uprising followed a series of peaceful protests aimed at checking the prison administration's continuous encroachment on the gains made during a 1970 work strike that brought them a measure of self-government. The rebellion took place after days of negotiation proved fruitless. The central demands of prisoners were for an end to one of the most barbaric behavior modification programs in the nation, in which prisoners were chained, beaten, forced to wear diapers and drink all liquids from a baby bottle; to stop the involuntary transfer of prisoners to out-of-state penal and psychiatric facilities, a repressive tool used against progressive prisoners; and to restore the power of the Resident Government Council taken by the state.

The warden ordered the prison tactical squad to attack the hospital. Two hostages were slightly injured while those holding them were brutally beaten. The defenders of Eight Wing surrendered after being guaranteed amnesty. The just demands of the prisoners were never met. Active prisoners were placed in the Intensive Security Unit where they were subjected to extreme forms of mistreatment, and from where they wrote letters to the left beseeching them to provide support. The left all but ignored their pleas for help, no doubt feeling powerless to do otherwise.

On June 1, 1975, the George Jackson Brigade publicly announced its existence by burglarizing the headquarters of the Department of Corrections in Olympia and planting a powerful pipe bomb under the desk in Robert Tropp's office. The resulting blast did over a hundred thousand dollars worth of damage to the building. A communique issued the same day explained the need to materially support the continuing struggle of prisoners. The document also explained the social role of prisons in capitalist society and again put forward the chief demands of Walla Walla prisoners. The reaction of prisoners to the blast was positive, but the action freaked out the left community. Persons who had previously advocated support for armed actions in the propaganda they printed refused to duplicate the G.J.B. communique or to even discuss the reasons for the refusal.

Not long after the Olympia bombing the F.B.I. initiated a wave of fascist terror against militants on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Indian reservations. This was supposedly in response to the killing of two F.B.I. agents

there. The entire community was outraged at the excesses of the federal agents, who invaded the reservations like the U.S. invaded Viet Nam. Native American leaders had been active in Seattle for a long time and the latest incident fueled this activity. A hundred mile mass march was organized in an attempt to force a change in the condition of Native Americans and to draw public attention to the atrocities being committed by the F.B.I. and B.I.A. on the reservations. The Brigade was asked to punctuate the Seattle to Portland march with some form of illegal action. Although the G.J.B. was of the opinion that the march would accomplish little more than a wearing away of shoe leather for those participating, and said as much, they agreed to help for different reasons. The group wanted to draw the wrath, or as much of it as they could, of the F.B.I. and B.I.A. from Pine Ridge to Seattle. Accordingly, in coordination with the mass march and in response to F.B.I. terrorism, the George Jackson Brigade simultaneously bombed the F.B.I. office in Tacoma and the B.I.A. offices in Everett. Rather than issuing a communique, the group called the media and simply stated that the actions were in response to F.B.I. and B.I.A. terrorism at Rosebud and Pine Ridge.<sup>10</sup> True to prediction, the marchers were humiliated and ignored by officials in Portland.

The only immediate criticism of the attacks came from more or less traditional but not so political Indians who, like some prisoners and super-oppressed blacks, questioned why certain enemies of the people were not put to death. The attitude of these people was typified by a Native American who said: "When the politicians get it together to deal with these pigs we are ready, but we are not going to march a hundred miles for them." Although the Brigade was underground, keeping its location secret from even their friends, they did their best to talk to the ordinary people affected by their actions. Suggestions to escalate the level of struggle were reluctantly dismissed as the group's rear was too weak to sustain it. In fact it was about this point, which was sometime in August, that the group started putting some distance between themselves and two types of people: the first was characterized by a lack of discipline and a tendency toward adventuristic bragging that could have jeopardized security. The second was ordinary poor people who, in one case with their children, wanted to join the Brigade. The question, which will be dealt with later, was between growth and security.

It might be fitting to note that at this point the group was supporting itself by working regular jobs and with donations during times of need from

a few people living in the base area who would help to finance specific projects. The left was of no help in terms of material support; their attitude in relating to the Brigade being one of seeing the group as a dangerous political curiosity (rather than as an integral part of the overall revolutionary dynamic).

Probably the nearest thing to a spontaneous action ever indulged in by the G.J.B. was its bombing of a Safeway store on Capital Hill in September of 1975. Chicano people had targeted Safeway for years because of its exploitation of farm labor and, in fact, was the focus of numerous boycotts, protests and, in the Bay Area, bombing attacks. Po was a Seattle activist who worked with the city's first men's paper as well as on other political projects. He was a very gentle and sensitive person at a time when the consciousness of the male left around the issue of sexism was substantially less than it is today. Anyway, in an action unrelated to the Brigade, Po was planting a bomb behind the Capital Hill Safeway store when he was killed. The device exploded while he was attempting to arm it (a product of careless and faulty construction). Out of respect for Po and what he was trying to accomplish, the Brigade decided to finish the job he had initiated. The group promptly put together two small and low charged (slow burning powder) pipe bombs, or was in the process of doing do, when news of the capture of Bill and Emily Harris and others associated with the S.L.A. was announced over the radio. Rational thinking suddenly turned to rage--it was this emotion rather than politics that moved the action forward.

The bombs were set to explode in 55 minutes and placed inside a fifty-pound sack of dry dog food. At the store another sack of the same brand was purchased, taken to the car and traded for the one with the explosives in it, then exchanged for another brand--leaving the rigged sack under an entire stack of dog food so no customer could inadvertently get the wrong sack. A call was made to the store about twenty minutes before the scheduled blast, stating the identity of the group, the general location of the bomb and the time of explosion. The employee was told to immediately evacuate the store. The warning call was ignored. A similar call was made to the news media, but was placed too late to effectuate evacuation. The bomb exploded inside the store, without warning, slightly injuring five people with pelts from flying dog food. Luck was the only influence preventing the incident from being more serious.



The hostility of Seattle's left toward the Brigade had been steadily growing, especially within those elements who had most loudly supported armed work prior to the advent of the G.J.B. Not only had the group not received a word of public or private support, but they were the habitual victim of verbal abuse by the general left. The left was fighting the Brigade even harder than the government; the C.P.U.S.A. going so far as to label them C.I.A. agents. The Safeway fiasco was just the ammunition they needed to complete the process of isolating the group. Masked in the rhetoric of criticism, P.F.O.C. and related people issued statements, circulated a petition and actively organized the community against the Brigade. They demanded the group leave town.<sup>11</sup>

For the next several months members of the Brigade traveled, studied, and worked at building a more secure base.<sup>12</sup> Kim Il Sung, in volume one of his works On Juche in Our Revolution, states:

To organize and develop the armed struggle through guerrilla warfare, a guerrilla base must be set up. A solid guerrilla base will make it possible to continually expand the armed ranks and wage protracted guerrilla warfare even when besieged by the formidable enemy. It will also make it possible for us to protect the revolutionary masses from the cold blooded murder and barbarity of the enemy. In particular, as we fight the armed struggle with no state backing and no aid from outside, we badly need our own firm military base, a rear base. Furthermore, this base is absolutely necessary in order to progress with preparations for the founding of the Community Party and the revolutionary movement as a whole, while waging armed struggle.

A guerrilla base can take different forms according to the prevailing subjective and objective situation, the environment and conditions of struggle or the degree of preparation of armed forces. (p. 21).

For the Brigade, base building meant doing armed robberies and other forms of illegal activity in order to finance equipment and related needs. While the group was not as conscious as these words may tend to make them sound, they did take in more members and more or less divided people into supply and combat functions. Although the lines between function were not sharply drawn, supply consisted of people who maintained the rural base while the combat unit kept up the city base. The two were connected by base radio, the cars by mobile radios, and individuals in action by portable radios. The purchase of transceivers, police scanners, directional antennas were a necessary but expensive part of the base. As more people joined the group, training became a part of the day to day work; weapons cleaning, handling, and target practice were especially important.

On January 1, 1976, the George Jackson Brigade initiated a multiple bombing attack to bring in the new year. Two bombs were planted at Safeway's main distribution complex in Bellevue, one under a coolant storage tank for the purpose of inflicting material damage, and the other at the administrative offices nearby. It was the group's intention to demonstrate, through its practice, the lessons learned since their last attack on Safeway. A communique issued that night contained an insightful self-criticism of the previous action against the store. On the same night and timed to explode at the same time as the Safeway bomb, the Brigade planted a powerful pipe bomb at a transformer complex in the very rich Laurelhurst neighborhood. The attack was in support of the long and courageous strike then being waged by Seattle's City Light workers. The blast completely destroyed the two hundred and fifty thousand dollar transformers and shut the power of the rich off during the height of their New Year celebrations. More importantly, the action had a marked impact on the length of the until then stalled negotiations and a positive effect on the terms of the settlement between the city and its Light workers. The morning after the action, strikers set up pickets on the bomb site to prevent scabs from repairing the damage. When the media tried to get City Light workers to denounce the Brigade, they refused to do so.

The Bellevue and Laurelhurst actions reflected the growing strength of the Brigade and caused more people to want to join. But it also strained the group's resources to the limits, necessitating planning for another act of expropriation. The G.J.B. was at a threshold: with adequate finances there would be substantial growth and a corresponding increase in security. Without it, the group could not grow. One afternoon of target practice costs up to fifty dollars, an average bomb attack generally runs about two hundred and fifty bucks, and of course, there is rent, transportation and food. Some Brigade members, such as Bruce Seidel and your author, were fugitives at this juncture and could not risk working on regular jobs. Besides, without intelligence units, it was necessary for members to spend most of their time planning and casing future actions.

On January 23 the Brigade suffered a major defeat when several members were trapped by police inside a Tukwila bank while in the process of expropriating forty-five thousand dollars. During the ensuing gun battle Bruce was murdered and John Sherman suffered a bullet wound in the face. John and the author were taken into custody. The get-away team managed to execute a shooting evasion of capture. The Brigade subsequently liberated John,

having to shoot a policeman in the stomach during the process. Numerous self-criticisms have been written with respect to this defeat, the essence of them being that the group should have been less concerned with the safety of bank employees and customers and planned for the possibility of a fight from the inside. They had underestimated the quickness with which the enemy would resort to violence. The group was not given an opportunity to surrender before Bruce was shot in the back.

There is no need to stress the loss to the movement involved in the murder of Bruce. He was the first to put up armed resistance against the state.

In the Mini-Manual of the Urban Guerrilla, Carlos Marighela wrote that: "It is impossible for an urban guerrilla to subsist or survive without taking part in the battle of expropriation." The growing cost of military and survival needs, the need for total self-sufficiency, drove the truth of Marighela's statement home. The Brigade lost the first major "battle of expropriation." Now,<sup>13</sup> while the group licks its wounds from Tukwila, is a good time for folks to seriously evaluate the theory and practice of armed struggle under the conditions as they exist in the United States today, giving special attention to the relationship between the aboveground and underground left. The practice of the G.J.B. is one context from within which this evaluation can be done. The theory and practice of the Black Liberation Army is another.

Any examination of the B.L.A. must, of course, be conducted from within the historical dynamic existing at the time of its formation. Joseph Waller, Chairman of the African People's Socialist Party, puts the dynamic in a proper perspective:

During the most significant period of B.L.A. activity the Black Liberation movement was at its weakest state. Riddled with informers and agent provocateurs, isolated by colonial propaganda, its best fighters killed, locked up, or facing trumped-up court battles, the Black Liberation Movement was incapable of providing the political base for an armed force. Additionally, the B.L.A. was deserted by many North American leftists when they discovered that the political debate around the sharpest questions was now being held at gun-point in the streets of colonialist America.

These factors contributed to its weakness. These and the fact that it was a defensive army, born on the run, picking up a comrade here, a gun over there, and attempting to build a strategy during the heat of battle. So, it wasn't a perfect army. But then, where has there ever been a perfect army except in the minds of our faint-hearted idealist friends who use the absence of perfection to justify non-support for the

African struggle. But it was our army. The birth was a dialectical response to our struggle. (Burning Spear, Vol. 6, #1).

As can be seen by the foregoing, the aboveground African People's Socialist Party reflects a healthy attitude toward its underground counterpart. Moreover, the A.P.S.P. materially supports and struggles for the freedom of B.L.A. prisoners, saying that "in most instances (they) are guilty as hell of what we should all be guilty of: attempting to advance the cause of liberty, socialism and world peace by striking fierce blows against the greatest enemy of all just human aspirations."

The politics of the Black Liberation Army, as those of the Brigade, reflect a proper perception of its relationship to the aboveground; that is, of different fronts in the same struggle.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned earlier, security dictates a separation between the aboveground and underground fronts. This separation has caused comrades with tunnel vision to think in exclusive terms, the ol' either/or syndrome that views political struggle as either mass or armed, without understanding the dialectical interdependence between the two. The B.L.A., in its Message to the Black Movement, emphasizes that it has not tried to pose as an alternative to mass organizing, but as a necessary supplement to it. Adding that the two are interdependent, the failure to support one is an objective failure to support the other and an "abdication of revolutionary responsibility." They go on to make a point the left in the Northwest should clearly understand:

We as a movement will be unable to fight in the future if we do not develop the capacity for revolutionary violence in the present. But revolutionary violence is not an alternative to mass movement and organization, it is another front in the total liberation process. Those who put the question in 'alternative' terms are guilty of crippled politics.... Those (who do not) 'endorse' revolutionary violence when it occurs, are attempting to legitimize their existence at the expense of the entire struggle. The only 'legitimacy' these people can possibly be seeking in such cases is bourgeois legitimacy.

By now it should be obvious that the relationship of the B.L.A. toward the mass movement is a healthy one. It should also be clear that the attitude of the A.P.S.P. and other Black Nationalist formations toward their underground counterpart is equally constructive. But there is no B.L.A. in the Northwest, only a multi-racial George Jackson Brigade serves the purpose of doing such work in our area. Examining the relationship of the Brigade to the aboveground struggles, one will find it to be basically healthy. Looking at the attitude of the left toward the G.J.B., on the

other hand, one finds many weaknesses. We will now spend considerable space examining the attitude of Seattle's left toward the Brigade, and while doing so will respond to their major criticisms of the underground group. The purpose in doing so is to expose the roots in opportunism of the poverty pimps, mis-leaders, and so-called Marxist-Leninists who sided with the ruling class in its effort to crush the Brigade.

Of course "leaders" of the aboveground community could not come out and openly proclaim their quest for legitimacy in the eyes of the bourgeois, as to do so would have exposed them for the opportunists they are. Accordingly, in the grand tradition of the Second International, they looked high and low for some colorable pretext for condemning those fighting and dying to move the struggle forward. Instead of a detailed examination of Brigade actions and theory, conducted in a manner that specified both the positive and negative aspects of each (from within the context of the group's process of political development), these so-called Marxists, like their social-chauvinist counterparts of 1914, confused those looking to them for political direction by shrouding their treachery in the cloak of Marxist-Leninist verbiage. "They omit," Lenin tells us in State and Revolution, "obliterate and distort the revolutionary side of Marx's teaching, its revolutionary soul. They push to the foreground and extol what is or seems acceptable to the bourgeoisie." The practical mechanics stooped to in accomplishing this was to find a political term loaded with negative connotations, label the Brigade with the word outside of any type of context, then reject the word, and by implication the Brigade, without any actual analysis. The end result would then be passed off as Marxist analysis. Their legitimacy in the eyes of the enemy remained intact, the respect of their followers unshaken, and it was business as usual. People waited for the perfect group to fall from the sky, like manna from heaven, while the "responsible left" continued to lead them in never ending circles of meaningless protests and reform. Like their counterparts of 1914, they patiently wait for the revolutionary situation to emerge from the inevitable contradictions of capitalism--forgetting Mao's teaching that "communists should create favourable new situations through struggle."

One of the first words or terms to become vogue in rejecting the Brigade was that the group was "militarist" and therefore not worthy of the support of serious revolutionaries. What is the political error of militarism? According to G.J.B. detractors it can be defined as "armed actions in command." This is an oversimplification. Joao Quartim is probably one

of the world's foremost critics of militarism. In his book Dictatorship and Armed Struggle in Brazil, he says the tendency is characterized by the following positions:

1. Rejection of systematic work in the mass movement.
2. Rejection of traditional forms of agitation and propaganda.
3. Tendency toward reducing organizational structure to armed groups alone.
4. Adoption of the foco theory as presented by Regis Debray in Revolution in the Revolution?

The Brigade does not reject systematic mass work, but attempts to supplement it. Nor does the group reject traditional forms of propaganda, rather it seeks to add armed propaganda to the arsenal of those conducting mass agitation. While the G.J.B. does tend to reduce its organizational structure to armed groups, this is dictated by both a revolutionary division of labor and security considerations, leaving mass groups to specialize in building that aspect of the movement. Lastly, in its political statement, the Brigade (but not this writer) clearly stated its opposition to the so-called foco theory. It should be clear from the above that the G.J.B. is not a militarist organization. Those who would argue otherwise should demonstrate in concrete terms how the theory and practice of the Brigade meets the Quartim test or other detailed standard of measurement.

It is possible that the Brigade may have been too eager to fight and in the process paid too little attention to slower and more silent development, but, given the extreme need of prisoners and others for some small defenses against state terror, it is doubtful. If so, the error resulted from an immediatist tendency rather than one toward militarism. The opposite error is reflected by organizations who proclaim the abstract necessity for armed struggle while not developing any concrete practice to demonstrate how they intend to engage in it. This gap between their theory and practice contributes to much of the political confusion such organizations seem to experience. They lose sight of the fact that a political army is not like the army of our enemy; they begin a war with an army ready at hand, whereas we must create an army during the course of the class and national liberation struggles.

Grouplets like the Brigade are the starting point. People come together to build and develop armed units, some are infiltrated or suffer other weaknesses causing them to fall by the wayside, while others are stronger and survive and grow.<sup>15</sup> During this period valuable experience is gained from

actual practice.<sup>16</sup> If an error is to be made, it should be on the side of action, not passive evasion of it. As Marighela taught: "It is better to act mistakenly than to do nothing for fear of doing it wrong." This is not action in command, but a simple recognition of the Marxist principle that we learn from our mistakes, and that it is through practice that we verify the correctness of our theory. Marxism is, after all, a guide to action.

In any case, the error of immediacy is relative to the degree of pressure one feels from the boot on their neck. For those radicals who have comfortably adjusted to the status quo it will never be the time to act.<sup>17</sup> For those under the hatch, however, the error of immediacy does not exist. There might be people who would argue that the Brigade over-extended itself by moving too fast. If so, the error is being rectified with a tactical retreat.<sup>18</sup> Now what is going to be done about those who would argue that the general left is moving too slow? The overground could remedy its political sluggishness by consciously working toward the creation of a broader infrastructure and by adopting a more offensive stance toward mass organizing.

Another example of the label syndrome is the smug application of the term "spontaneism" as a means of dismissing the Brigade. Using Lenin's condemnation of terrorism as a form of spontaneism, right-opportunists attack the group because of its alleged belief in the use of terror. Again, they make no reference to specific acts, nor do they attempt to examine G.J.B. theory on the question in light of today's material conditions. Instead they expediently drop the label, add some Leninist rhetoric, and then use the two as a scientific basis for rejecting the group.

It is true that terrorism as the principal form of political action, as a strategy for revolution, cannot be the means for the liberation of the masses and is therefore incompatible with Marxism. The droppers of this label, however, do not bother to take the matter far enough to see if in fact the G.J.B. views terrorism "as the principle form of struggle." Marxism-Leninism rejects no form of struggle, a point Lenin made in the first issue of Iskra. Communism, he says, "does not tie its hands, it does not restrict its activities to some one preconceived plan or method of political struggle; it recognizes all means of struggle...." Those who think otherwise should study Lenin's essay on Guerrilla Warfare. In fact, when the party was underground after the defeat of the 1905 revolution, Lenin was a train robber. Stalin supported the movement by robbing

banks. Mao later started the Red Army with one group of politicians and two groups of bandits.

Those who do not want to fight the enemy cannot successfully use Marx or Lenin to rationalize their passivity, at least not without applying such teachings to the concrete realities of today. What is unfortunate is that the practice of passing off mere labels as Marxist analysis confuses honest people who get caught up in the revolutionary veneer these opportunists give their reformist sophisms. Black liberation is the question our opportunists really must avoid as it puts the issue of armed struggle on the agenda of the day more clearly than any other.

Those who swallow the spontaneism label with respect to groups like the Brigade inevitably find themselves standing side by side with the bourgeois media in denouncing "terrorism." Lacking a dialectical appreciation of revolutionary violence, they let the enemy define the actions of armed groups and then adopt that definition for their own use. But not all revolutionary violence is terrorist.<sup>19</sup> Terror is usually invoked in response to specific acts of ruling class violence. In addition to communicating a state of mind to the enemy, terror, if correctly applied, can be an important deterrent to some of the most flagrant manifestations of fascism, and a tool for raising the consciousness of the masses. The actions of the Lolita Lebron group in 1954 and the seizure of aircraft by the P.L.O. are two examples that readily come to mind. In order for terrorism to be effective, however, the action must clearly demonstrate the cause and effect relationship between imperialist violence and revolutionary violence.

The different levels of terror can be divided into two general categories--limited and unlimited. The attack mounted by the Brigade against the F.B.I. office in Tacoma (in response to F.B.I. terrorism at Pine Ridge), while not perfect, was a good example of limited counter terror. It was terror because the act was not preceded with a warning and was intended to create fear in those it was directed against. The G.J.B. is not a partisan of unlimited terror nor an advocate of the frequent use of limited terror. Terror is the weapon of the weak and is usually employed under conditions of extreme desperation. Its use by urban militants should be restricted to those rare instances demanding its application.<sup>20</sup>

Most Brigade actions, if not all of them, have been in support of some mass struggle. At times, such as the Olympia and Laurelhurst bombings, they were unsuccessful attempts to draw the attention of the left to intense grass roots struggles being ignored by the political community. Always



the actions met one or more of the "exact political purposes" mentioned earlier. Terror, it may be remembered, was not listed as a purpose of armed struggle. Terrorism, the political philosophy that a government can be changed through the use of terror as a strategy, as the G.J.B. has noted, is the reverse side of the reformist coin in that it rejects the role of the masses of people. The infrequent use of counter-terror as a tactic is not terrorism, which elevates the tactic of terror to the level of a strategy. To confuse this distinction is to fall into the trap created by the bourgeois media, which, as in the case of the liberation struggles being waged in Southern Africa, dismisses all armed resistance as terrorist activity. When the U.S. left does the same thing it is objectively aiding the enemy.

The success of groups like the Brigade is measured in terms of their ability to survive over a long period of time. Using the capacity to survive as a yardstick, it is clear the efforts of such groups within the U.S. have not been very successful. We can, however, find successful examples of the basic principles herein enunciated by looking outside our borders. The most recent example is the People's Fedayee Guerrilla Organization, the group that led the spectacular counterattack on the Shah's Imperial Guard and played a decisive role in the demoralization and collapse of the Iranian Army. The Fedayee, as they are called, are a group of Marxist-Leninist urban guerrillas who, despite cries of "terrorists" from the bourgeoisie and revisionists, used armed struggle to shatter the masses' illusions of its powerlessness in fighting the enemy.<sup>21</sup> Their first major action was launched on February 8, 1971, when they attacked a police station to free two comrades, an action resulting in several days of chase and fighting in the jungle and leaving 15 Fedayee members dead or captured. This February 8th, the event was celebrated by 10,000 revolutionaries making a major offensive on the Shah's police and army installations. Over the years their tactics have been: attacks on secret police; armed propaganda within workers' strikes, and armed defense when attacked by government forces.

In addition to the theory and practice of the Brigade, we have examined, albeit briefly, that of other groups such as the Black Liberation Army, the S.L.A., and the Fedayee of Iran. There are others people should study, the M.I.R. in Chile, for example, the point being that U.S. revolutionaries have much to learn from the struggles being waged throughout the world in terms of broadening the existing forms of struggle in this country. We have also

touched on the major criticisms leveled at groups like the G.J.B., although, as in the case of Viet Nam's armed propaganda units, the ultimate test will lie in the long term effects of the political practice of such groups, and not on the various theoretical condemnations issued by armchair revolutionaries.

At present the armed front is the weakest link in the revolutionary chain and must be strengthened before the test of practice can be put into effect. Recognizing the priority of building the armed front should not be equated with abandoning mass work. The handful of people who respond to the "call to arms" will leave behind them, to do purely mass/legal work, all those who are not prepared for the hardships of life as an urban guerrilla.<sup>22</sup> Once the Brigade is brought up to strength (a headquarters with combat, support and intelligence units), and similar groups are formed in other areas of the country, the building of the armed front should no longer be a priority--the movement will be able to walk on both legs, and there will be shelter for aboveground workers who are eventually driven underground.

Who should respond to this call? What is needed is scientific fighters, people who put the revolutionary struggle above all else. Although complementary to the mass front, the activities of the urban guerrilla are not mass struggle. In fact, the less contact such a group has with the masses the better will be its security. Thus, in order to grow, it is necessary for groups like the Brigade to recruit new cadre rather than sections of the urban poor and working masses. As a detachment of the most advanced sectors of the popular movement, it is within this sector of the political community that the initial work of proselytizing must be focused.

While the Brigade initially based itself within the most exploited segments of the working class, it did so at the sacrifice of important security considerations. In fact, the need to protect its clandestine nature is what caused the group to turn to expropriation. With the increased level of self-sufficiency provided by expropriation came the discovery that the less contact they had with poor and working people the better their security tended to be. Hence, at least in the early stages when minor security violations can have major adverse effects, recruitment should be cadre oriented. While such a policy will limit a group's ability to grow, the policy is not a permanent or inflexible one. There are risks in every approach that must be balanced with the circumstances of specific situations.

The Brigade's initial one year plan was to have one foot rooted in the urban poor, and the other within the advanced sector of Seattle's left community, while building for self-sufficiency through expropriation. Each approach has its special disadvantages. The Brigade started with a base in the urban poor. The disadvantage of this approach lies in the high likelihood of undisciplined gossip leading to someone informing the police of the group's location. The disadvantage of relying on the left for support lies in the possibility of being betrayed from the rear, which is in effect what happened to the Brigade. The drawback associated with the third approach, expropriation, is of course the possibility of capture or death if the action is less than perfectly executed.

As a general rule, any group doing armed work should move as quickly as possible toward total self-reliance through expropriation or similar means. Then, from a position of self-sufficiency, it should expand contact with the advanced sectors of the left and then the urban poor. This will protect the group from the worse consequences of betrayal from the left and from being informed on by elements of the non-political poor. The urban workers, it might be noted, readily accepted the need for a group specializing in the armed aspect of struggle and quickly demonstrated this with a willingness to participate in some Brigade actions and by their willingness to otherwise support the group's activities. It was surprising to see how far ahead of the left the attitudes of common people really were with respect to such matters.

Getting back to the question of priorities for the non-revisionist left, as mentioned above, implementing the revolutionary division of labor--dictating the existence of groups specializing in the armed aspect of struggle--is the principle task in the present period of revolutionary development. Those who feel this need are urged to move in the direction of strengthening the armed front, leaving others free to do purely mass agitation and organizing within the popular movement.

In implementing this priority, this revolutionary division of labor, there is a need for unity of purpose between the aboveground and underground workers--for people to focus on commonalities rather than petty differences. Contrary to popular belief, political verbiage will not bring people any closer to unity (as the unending "polemic" between sect groups so clearly demonstrates). The key to unity lies in actual struggle. Intellectual masturbation is not struggle! The unity of Attica's prisoners, for example, grew out of a direct confrontation with the state over issues of

immediate concern to the prisoners. It did not grow out of prisoners arguing over how many Marxists could dance on the point of a needle, or in an unending refinement of line. Unity does not develop in a vacuum, but from within the context of a common conflict. The lesson of Attica must be implemented in order to achieve the degree of unity necessary to build a fighting movement. The lesson is that there must be a point of conflict or there exists a state of class peace.

The simple fact of the matter is that we as a movement are not going to get anywhere until we start winning some real victories. The myth of the government's invincibility must be destroyed and the possibility of winning demonstrated. This cannot happen without the demands of the people being backed with the possibility of revolutionary violence. As George Jackson said: "Any serious organizing of people must carry with it from the start a potential threat of revolutionary violence." The potential for the possibility of violence must be created and then exercised in actual class conflict. The immediate goal people should strive to achieve is to coordinate the legal and illegal fronts in common struggle against our class enemy and in support of the masses. When this happens the movement will have a powerful and winning combination.

The priorities necessary to achieve this goal are simple enough to implement: First, the Brigade or groups like it must be brought up to complete combat readiness, practicing localized and relatively infrequent acts of arms forms of struggle for both the practice and effect. Secondly, the aboveground workers must get it together to the point of taking aggressive organization and a determination to win to the struggling masses.<sup>24</sup> The recent practice of aboveground workers, the honest observer must admit, stands as a monument to ineffectiveness in terms of both its theory and practice. Yet when was the last time the reader heard them admit to a mistake or criticize themselves?

The Brigade has issued both public and private criticisms of its theory and practice and has rectified each to reflect its internalization of the lesson in question. But criticism is a two-way street; it looks in as well as out. A step toward building a better relationship between aboveground and underground workers is for the former to couple their criticisms of the latter with an examination of their own practice.

The G.J.B. has had two policies on criticism from the aboveground left, both of which have been repeatedly stated and consistently ignored. Criticism is a valuable tool in our struggle for liberation from ruling class

domination and should be seen as such and responded to if at all legitimate. After nearly a year of intense anti-Brigade propaganda from the left, without one word of support from their aboveground counterparts, the group first asked for the same consideration due any comrade--that criticism be made from within the context of general support. Such respect was never shown; instead they continued to be bombarded with charges of being fascists, having police agents amongst them, etc. This led to the second policy; that those doing so-called mass work couple their criticisms with an examination of their own political productivity. The Brigade did not think it unreasonable for their detractors to take a peek at their own practice and especially their role in relation to those doing armed work. This too has never happened.

When the F.B.I. was attacking Native Americans at Pine Ridge the Brigade attacked the F.B.I. in an effort to draw the heat off the reservation and on to themselves. When the F.B.I. attacked the Brigade, however, the aboveground left scrambled over each other in a mad rush to attack the group rather than the F.B.I. Instead of rushing support to a zone under stress, the left worked to further isolate and weakened them. It is this sort of conduct the left should critically examine.

The net effect of all this one way criticism has been to further the government's basic repressive strategy--to divide. By dividing the aboveground from the underground the government is able to isolate the latter and render it vulnerable to attack. This is what happened with the S.L.A. and, to a much lesser degree, the G.J.B. in its urban base area. The revisionist left actually helped the bourgeois media and F.B.I. do its dirty work. This is not to say those on the armed front should not be subject to criticism. Rather, it is being asked that communists counterbalance the divisive effect of criticism by doing it over real issues, from within the context of general support, and by accompanying it with a self-criticism.<sup>25</sup>

Brigade members struggle against tremendous odds just to survive from day to day. It is demoralizing when folks refuse to even give them credit as people or to recognize their positive aspects. All actions aside, one would think folks might at least commend the Brigade for being anti-sexist, in that it consists of sexual minorities and straights who are conscious of the need to combat heterosexism; or for being anti-racist, in that it is multi-racial in makeup and supporting in practice the right oppressed nations within the U.S. for self-determination; and who in their practice fight with arms in hand for the revolutionary struggles of poor and working people.

Groups such as the Brigade cannot be painted with an all white brush, or an all black brush, as nothing is all good or all bad. Our criticisms should reflect this dialectical reality. Only time will tell if the Brigade has the strength to survive the years of battering and serious defeats imposed on it by the state. But whether it survives as a group or not, the lessons people have learned must be remembered and shared. Thus, when a similar group emerges in any community it will not have to take a beating from the left as well as the state. The Brigade got off lighter than the S.L.A. in terms of death, although more of its members are imprisoned. Let's hope the next such group pays even less. One way to help is for those doing aboveground work to use the weapon of criticism as a tool of revolution rather than an instrument serving the interests of the enemy state.

This is probably as good a time as any to remind those doing aboveground work that revolution is unlawful. It is a taking of the law into your own hands and thus requires a high degree of risk and possible sacrifice for those who genuinely seek a radical transformation of existing class relations. Dedicated communists must come to grips with the fact that imprisonment is a probable consequence of revolutionary activity. Here are some sobering statistics: the Sixth Congress of the Bolshevik Party held its last pre-power congress in Petrograd on July 26, 1917. Out of 175 delegates (representing 112 organizations with 176,750 members), 171 filled out a questionnaire on themselves. 110 had spent 245 years in prison; 10 delegates had spent 41 years at hard labor; 24 had spent 73 years in penal settlements; 55 had been in exile 127 years; and 150 had been arrested 549 times. Compare these old time Bolsheviks with the leaders of today's left and the opportunism that motivates them. Having lost their faith in the people, and considering unshakable the foundations of that which they talk about changing, they fall into the comfortable practice of reform. Such people can only lead us to our knees.

The world wide revolutionary movement is entering into a difficult and dangerous period. We stand at the threshold of the beginning of the end. Surviving the hardships lying ahead is going to require a new style of work and a slogan applicable to the material conditions of today's world. Western communists are going to have to solve for themselves the problems of conducting proletarian revolution from within the belly of the imperialist beast. This requires a high degree of creative thinking and numerous experiments in political practice by all who fly under the flag of the non-

revisionist left. While it is important to study the lessons of other revolutions, both their successes and failures, people must remain independent from the dogma of foreign socialist countries. To accomplish this, people must get back to political basics, to the question of class, and abandon "three word" theories and slogans that liquidate the class question. The alternative is to chance finding oneself in the position of the CP/M-L in supporting U.S. imperialism, or the P.F.O.C. when it blindly followed China into backing the C.I.A. and U.N.I.T.A. in Angola.

Our own enemy is the U.S. ruling class. All who oppose this enemy, while we may disagree with them on some issues, are objectively our allies. This includes Russia (there is no such thing as "Soviet social imperialism" and capitalism has not been restored in the U.S.S.R. <sup>\*</sup>) And all who side with the capitalist class, regardless of how much we might agree with them on some issues, are objectively our enemies. This includes China's present leadership.

The enemy is internally divided, unstable and on the defensive. Its massive apparatus of repression is a sign of its weakness, not its strength. Now is the time to initiate offensive struggle against the class enemy, to start the process of contending for power. Certainly nothing would more inspire and encourage the world's freedom fighters than to see the opening stage of class war unfold inside Amerika. And no other course of action would more cripple the government's ability to launch foreign military adventures such as that threatened in the Middle East.

Up until now those operating under an anti-imperialist slogan have limited themselves to rather passive "support" or "solidarity" with those waging armed struggle in this and other countries. This is no longer enough! Real proletarian internationalism is when the world's people fight together against the enemy of all humanity. Anything short of organizing for determined class war is Amerikan exceptionalism in practice and works to retard development of the world wide movement. People should be organized to fight around the strategic slogan of class war and national liberation. The fight will clarify the issues and lead to conditions favorable for building revolutionary organization.

The strength of class forces is tested in conflict--the events of revolution reduce themselves to these repeated trials of force--the power slowly

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\* The means of production are not reduced to the level of commodities; hence the U.S.S.R. does not meet Marx's definition of capitalism.

shifting from the enemy class to the forces of the people. Leaders who are unwilling to stand up to the demands of these trials should get out of the way or be tossed aside. There is no room for cowards and opportunists, which is what our leaders are when they confine their political activity to safe reforms and otherwise seek to avoid the risk and sacrifice aspects of the struggle.

The bankruptcy of the old order is clearly exposed to all thinking people. They find themselves attracted to the culture and politics of the communist alternative, but the superficiality of the radical political understanding and a weak approach to practice tends to leave the uncommitted still uncommitted. If the advanced sectors of the left can successfully trace these weaknesses to their basis in bourgeois ideology, conditioned into us since birth, and effectively deal with them, then the movement will have made a major step toward increasing its ability to grow in both size and strength. Opportunism is one such weakness, the residual values of a petty bourgeois background is another. The combination of the two can be recognized as the little voice inside us saying "me first," "my comfort," "my property," "my security," etc., ad nauseam. This defect retards development of the struggle and must be ruthlessly dealt with in ourselves as well as those around us. It is characteristic of the enemy to try and conceal personal or group weaknesses. Communists will not become strong by adopting this characteristic. In fact, it is our willingness to admit mistakes and change that helps to win uncommitted people over to the communist alternative.

As Che taught, it is in the struggle to destroy the old society that we must lay the foundations for the new one. One of the starting points for creating the basis of a new order is for progressive people to initiate the personal changes necessary for their transformation into the type of people the future society will be composed of. This means seriously confronting, and not just giving lip service to, racism, sexism, ageism and classism. Few of today's so-called Marxist-Leninists understand that the revolution must be cultural as well as political and economic in nature. At present people need new leaders and cultural revolution within the sectarian and dogmatic segments of the white left. If this is to happen it won't come about smoothly or without hard feelings, as it means exposing internal weaknesses and a lot more that is beyond the scope of this already lengthy article.



### Conclusion

Much of the cultural material in the original document has been omitted in favor of matters pertaining to theory or practice. This was not done to belittle the importance of revolutionary culture, but rather as a practical necessity dictated by space limitations and the priority of the subject matter indicated by the title. It is the writer's hope that the reader will study this paper with friends, criticize it where needed, and quickly move to implement the lessons it contains.

Love and struggle,

Ed Mead, #251397

Original version 2/76, King County Jail

Rewritten, 2/79, Washington State Prison

(Presently at Brushy Mountain Prison, Petros, TN 37845)

### Footnotes

- 1 "And if, as you and others might so easily believe, that we will lose, let it be known that even in death we will win, for the very ashes of this fascist nation will mark our very grave.  
Cinque, S.L.A. Communique #12
- 2 See, e.g., "The S.L.A.: Terrorism and the Left", Ramparts, Vol. 12, No. 10 (May 1974), 21-27.
- 3 "The long range goal of the guerilla front is to build the well trained nucleus of the future people's army. I see the strategy of armed struggle as the means by which we insure our victory over U.S. imperialism. The leadership of women at all levels of this struggle is the means by which women insure that our interests are fully represented and fought for at each stage along the way."  
Emily Harris, Dragon #4, Nov. 1975
- 4 "Next, let us consider war. If those who lead a war lack experience of war, then at the initial stage they will not understand the profound laws pertaining to the directing of a specific war. At the initial stage they will merely experience a good deal of fighting and, what is more, suffer many defeats. But this experience, the experience of battles won and especially of battles lost, enables them to comprehend the inner thread of the whole war, namely, the laws of that specific war, to understand its strategy and tactics, and consequently to direct the war with confidence."  
Mao Tse Tung, Selected Works, p. 73
- 5 "Our intention is to disrupt the empire...to incapacitate it, to put pressure on the cracks, to make it hard to carry out its bloody functioning against the people of the world, to join the world struggle, to attack from the inside."  
Prairie Fire
- 6 Selected Readings, p. 19
- 7 "To exclude, to deny, to reject a priori all those who from the beginning did not call themselves communists is an act of dogmatism and unqualified sectarianism. Whoever denies that it is the road of revolution which leads the people to Marxism is no Marxist although he may call himself a communist."  
Fidel Castro, 2/4/62

- 8 "Basically, I have three backgrounds: I have a work background, a love background, and a prison background. My prison background means that I have close ties and feelings with our incarcerated brothers and sisters. What they have taught me is that if people on the outside do not understand the necessity of defending them through force of arms, then it is because these people on the outside do not yet realize that they are in immediate danger of being thrown into concentration camps themselves, tortured, or shot down in the streets for expressing their beliefs...."

Fahizah, S.L.A. Communique #10

And:

"As a revolutionary woman I have always been motivated by a sense of my own experience, not because I feel my own oppression, past or present, is more intense than that of other sisters and brothers; but because my true anger surfaces around things that have happened to me, not things I read or hear about. My solidarity with other oppressed people in this country and throughout the world grows from sharing a common experience--we are under the life threat of a common enemy. None of us can be free until we are all free!

Emily Harris, Dragon #4, Nov. 1975

- 9 "I wish to say to those who speak about what they want, to you I say that your words and cries will bring you nothing but a wet face and an empty heart, the enemy is unhearing and he is unmerciful to the oppressed. If you would have freedom for your children, then you as all oppressed people will have to fight and struggle for it. Freedom is not tax deductible, nor is it willed to you, no piece of paper can sign it over to you or your children, it is something that in an oppressive world can only be gained and protected by the force of your arms and your spirit to defend that freedom at any cost."

Cinque, S.L.A. Communique #27

- 10 "Terrorism is perpetrated by the ruling class and its government on the people. Terrorism is black children shot down in the street. It is SWAT in Los Angeles and search-and-destroy in Vietnam. It is the daily brutality for millions of Americans and the even harsher brutality for those who imperialism exploits in the Third World."

The W.U.O.

- 11 "Consider the charges of infantile leftism and counter-revolutionary activity connected with the killing of Foster and the taking of Ms. Hearst as a hostage (by the S.L.A.). The source of these charges provides the best commentary: the white male left, of course, expects decisions of who lives and who dies to remain in the hands of white males and the fact that Foster was a black of their own generation made it all the easier to protest."

Safe House, pp. 83-84

- 12 "Our intention is to forge an underground ... a clandestine political organization engaged in every form of struggle, protected from the eyes and weapons of the state, a base against repression, to accumulate lessons, experience and constant practice, a base from which to attack."

Prairie Fire

- 13 The original draft of this document was written shortly after the unsuccessful attempt at expropriation (Feb. 1976) and thus does not reflect the group's subsequent actions, which include about a half-dozen successful expropriations and approximately a dozen more bombings and related activities. For a full account of actions up to 1978 see the "chronology" in the G.J.B.'s Political Statement.

- 14 "Revolutionary armed struggle must be viewed in the context of a large, progressive mass based movement. There is much work that needs to be done in above ground organizing, but armed struggle is not a contradiction to that--it is a necessary part of any revolutionary movement that has a chance of succeeding. The extent to which parts of the women's movement are advocating non-violence corresponds to the extent to which their white-middle class privileges allows them to do so."  
Bay Area Research Collective, Dragon #4
- 15 "The initial struggle by small combat units is incessantly fed by new forces, the mass movement begins to loosen its bonds, the old order little by little begins to break into a thousand pieces, and that is the moment when the working class and urban masses decide the battle."  
Fidel Castro, 2/4/62, The Road to Revolution in Latin America
- 16 "And the best teachers of revolutionaries in every country...--as it was in Cuba--the best teachers, the great teachers, were the setbacks."  
Fidel Castro, 2/4/62, The Road to Revolution in Latin America
- 17 "Some on the left dissociate mass struggle from revolutionary violence and condemn any act of public militancy or armed struggle as adventurist. This is characteristic of oppressor-nation movements where violence is raised to a question of abstract principle, and the illusion is fostered that imperialism will decay peacefully; 'violence turns people off,' 'it's too early,' 'violence only brings down repression.'"  
Prairie Fire
- 18 "...in a guerilla movement there is no tactical retreat; because a guerilla that retreats is like an airplane that cuts the engine in midflight; it falls to the ground \* \* \* A guerilla can be totally withdrawn, but he (sic) cannot retreat."  
Fidel Castro, 2/4/62, The Road to Revolution in Latin America
- 19 "The government has institutionalized terrorism and violence and what people call terrorism is simply a response to that violence."  
Emile De Antonio, filmmaker
- 20 "To put it bluntly, it is necessary to create terror for a while in every ...area, or otherwise it would be impossible to suppress the activities of the counter-revolutionaries in the countryside or overthrow the authority of the gentry. Proper limits have to be exceeded in order to right a wrong, or else the wrong cannot be righted."  
Mao Tse Tung, Selected Works, p. 30
- 21 "All of that (the oppressive continuation of the old order) was possible while the entire people believed the myth that the prevailing force could not be overcome, that the prevailing force was invincible. That system was maintained more--much more--by myth and lie than by the actual force that defended it."  
Fidel Castro, 2/4/62, The Road to Revolution in Latin America
- 22 "I remembered those first days of the revolution...those times of tremendous difficulty, when only a small group of us remained together. I remember those days of hunger and cold, with only a cloak to protect us from the rain, without protective covering from the cold of the mountains, without shoes to wear, with only a few bullets in our rifles, pursued by a myriad of soldiers. I remember those days when the Revolution looked

like it would be defeated because of our own weaknesses, because we were so few. I remember those days when faith entered into the men assuring them that they had a great and noble cause, a faith which led us forward, led us into the fighting without shrinking back, even though we were so few."

Fidel Castro Speaks, p. 59

And:

"(H)ad we been men with little faith in the Revolution, we would have given up the fight following our first setback at the Moncada Barracks, or when our little army landed from the 'Granma' only to be dispersed three days later, and only seven of us were able to reunite. Thousands, or rather millions of reasons could have been used as a pretext to say that we were wrong and that those who said it was impossible...were right."

Fidel Speaks, p. 128

- 24 "Militancy stirs the imagination and raises the vision of victory. Militancy is a street demonstration, in a courtroom, in a rally, in a prison takeover, is recognized and respected as an uncompromising statement. It is a confrontation with the opposing system. Involving people in militant action trains and teaches. Militant action is related to the understanding that the struggle is not merely for the separate issues but is ultimately for power--necessarily including armed struggle to defeat the oppressive forces of the state. To leave people unprepared to fight the state is to seriously mislead them about the inevitable nature of what lies ahead."

Prairie Fire

- 25 "The reality of class war in Amerika is here on a day-to-day basis for millions of people in this world who do not have the 'choice' of remaining aloof from it. We must not rush into militant actions out of guilt or frustration. Many of us will choose to do the equally important work of aboveground organizing. But to denounce other comrades who...are beginning to engage in armed struggle serves only to weaken our movement."

Bay Area Research Collective, Dragon #4

Ed Mead, 2/1/80