

TO STAY IN THE FOREST BUT TO SEE THE TREES

"Most pamphlets deal with content and issues. This one is about methods... As far as we're concerned, the means justify the means."

Anti-Mass

In this paper we present arguments describing day-to-day community organizing as the basic component needed for an effective movement. We do not deal specifically with the peace treaty since we feel that it is a mechanism developed in response to a particular situation existing in Vietnam and the US. Rather, we discuss past anti-war efforts and make a specific proposal for what should be done now.

The anti-war movement developed to the point where it recognized that to struggle simply against the war was to be limited in scope and effectiveness. By failing to make a general critique of domestic society, such a movement did not understand that the struggles against war, racism and sexism are of necessity the same struggle.

The multi-issue movement has the ability to equate what it is that keeps people at home miserable, isolated and depressed with that which destroys Vietnam and people around the world. It has the ability to build true internationalist consciousness based on the fight against a common oppressor. This consciousness is a necessary precondition for the transformation of the American empire.

### An Analysis of the Past Year

The single issue anti-war movement built mass demonstrations calling for the end to the war. After the action, activity ceased until the next demonstration. The mass action became an end in itself, and the anti-war movement was reduced to a conglomeration of bodies that would be summoned to rallies by organizers.

The movement was not sustained because it had no base which existed between demonstrations; it was in no way democratic because the demonstrators had no means to participate except to show up at the next demonstration.

The mass of "bodies" were denied their minds by the demonstration organizers who called the rallies and made the decisions. After the rally, people returned to their school, factory, or communities and were just as isolated, fucked-up, fucked-over and powerless as before the demonstration. As a movement, we failed to establish an ongoing presence or to sustain our struggle. As a result, people lost hope and retreated into their isolation.

### Cambridge- A Case Study

After the collapse of most organized activity after last May, many people in Cambridge turned to community work as a means of reaching people at the grass roots level in an ongoing way. People's institutions were begun like the Red Book Book Store, Clothing Exchanges, Community Dinners, people's media center. Tenants Unions were organized. A food cooperative was formed bloc by bloc, skills schools were begun to provide ourselves with the means to survive. From these projects we have been able to maintain a continuous political presence in Cambridge and have slowly involved more and more people in organizing efforts. These projects have provided us with the basis for communication and action networks within our youth communities. These networks have been used for the sustenance of our daily lives-- food co-ops, raising bail money-- breaking down the isolation which exists as well as reacting to crisis situations.

We will no longer be at the mercy of fate but will have a community which together can take positive action through democratic procedures. Positive action not only at the community level but around national and international issues as well.

Right now, we are trying to encourage the formation of Vietnam Committees in as many neighborhoods as possible. These committees are being set up by members of the food co-op and the tenants union in any give bloc area. Once a committee forms in a bloc area they can call together, for example, all the food co-op members in their bloc area, which may be from 15-50 people. These people can discuss the peace treaty, the war, see films about Vietnam gotten from the local news-reel office. And these groups of people can discuss ways of involving all their neighbors in anti-war activities.

On campuses it seems that a way to create a high level of activity and to overcome passivity on the part of students would be to create Vietnam Committees in departments, dorm floors, living groups, etc.

This is not to deny the importance of mass actions. Through the networks established, mass mobilization could happen very easily and very quickly. But such demonstrations will be different from those in the past. They will not be an end in themselves. The demonstrators will be an organized base that will return to their blocs and neighborhoods with greater energy involvement and numbers. They will be people who know each other, people who see each other at times other than just demonstrations. The demonstration will be something that they do together within a context.

There is no one method for all of us since we come from different areas and diverse constituencies (if we truly have a constituency at all). Nevertheless, day to day community organizing must be seen as an essential basis for our efforts.

We submit the TDA proposal as a concrete point from which we can begin to act. It was written for the Boston/Cambridge area but can be applied to any campus or community- and to the entire country.

An addition to the proposal must be made-- that the escalation discussed in it include escalations in the war at home.

A Cambridge Vietnam Committee