

# BUILD AN ASIAN STUDENT MOVEMENT

ASU/SFS

[The following is the transcript of a speech presented in the Student Organizing section in the recent national Asian Studies Conference held in San Jose, California. It was presented by a student from Laney College in Oakland, California. The sub-heads are ours.—Ed. note.]

Good Evening,

My presentation will focus on the role of Asian students and the importance of building Asian student organizations at this time.

You might ask, "Why and what kind of Asian student organizations? Isn't this a conference for Asian Studies?"

We must examine the aspects of these questions very carefully. To do so, we have divided the presentation into the following parts.

1. The blossoming of the student movement and the role Asian Americans played.
2. The establishment of Asian Studies and an analysis of its contributions and limitations.
3. The need for building Asian student organizations, their nature and their purpose, and their relationship to Asian Studies.
4. The various areas of work and methods of organizing student organizations.

The growth of the American student movement can be attributed to three great movements that had immense impact on our society. First, there was the Civil Rights Movement, which sparked a growing militancy among Black Americans. Black people, in fighting against racism and for their democratic rights, played an exemplary and vanguard role in the struggle of all Third World (TW) people in the U.S. This movement also set into motion a wave of student activism; students played an important role in building support for the Black struggle among other sectors of the population, and were active organizers and participants in the movement.

## Anti-War Movement

Secondly, the anti-war movement brought the struggles of the American people to a new level. Students played a leading role in the movement, exposing US imperialism in Indochina, and building massive and widespread opposition to the war. In addition, Asians specifically played a key role; as part of the movement, we recognized that we

had to relate the war concretely to struggles of Asians in America. Thus, we brought out the racist and genocidal character of the war and drew parallel examples between the Vietnamese fight for liberation abroad and our fight for liberation at home.

Thirdly, student unrest and activism hit the campuses across the nation, calling attention to institutional racism, and the irrelevancy of the educational system to the lives and needs of the American people. We began to see that these various issues were not isolated cases, but instead, glaring reflections of the fundamental problems facing all of society.

## Self-Determination

Again, Asians were a significant force in the movement. Spurred on by the black and anti-war movement, Asians soon recognized our own history of racial oppression and the contemporary problems facing Asian people. As our consciousness and identity matured, we began to relate to problems in our communities, on the campus, and in general society. Asians brought forth the militant demand for self-determination — i.e., our rights to maintain and build our national cultures, history, language, etc., and to determine our own destinies free from racial oppression. To lead this sweeping Asian movement, many campuses formed student organizations, like the Asian American Political Alliance on the West Coast.

The Asian student movement exploded and peaked during the TW strikes of 1968-69. Asians, along with other TW people, demanded the establishment of an autonomous TW college that could meet the needs of TW people in America. After a long and hard fought strike, we won this battle for Ethnic Studies, but did not gain complete autonomy from the administration. In any event, the militant strikes at BERKELEY and SF STATE led to the establishment of Asian Studies (AS) across the country.

The emergence of AS nationwide, attracted the most progressive and active Asian students. Student organizations merged with AS and thus, AS became the leading force in the Asian movement. Since this time, AS had played an instrumental role in building the consciousness of Asians, unifying students, and in providing an intellectual foundation for analyzing the problems facing Asians in the US.

### Self-Determination

Besides its many contributions, AS also had its limitations in leading the Asian movement. At times, school administrations implemented AS in hopes of pacifying and co-opting the student dissent. Also, as Jeff stated (previous speaker), AS is dependent upon and restricted by the educational institution and is often limited to serving a purely academic function. As a result of these factors, Asian Studies has a tendency to isolate itself from the masses of students and ceases to be part of the various struggles of Asian students, workers, and communities.

Because of these limitations, it is essential that Asian rebuild the broad student movement to organize Asians on an ongoing and independent manner. We must again intensify and raise the struggle for the needs and rights of Asian in America.

Now, let us talk about these student organizations. Do we see Asian Studies as a negative force and want to replace them with student organizations? No, we do not. WE continue to see the Asian Studies division as an important force on the campus. Asian student organizations must play a complementary role to Asian Studies. Being an independent force, student organizations have more flexibility in taking progressive public positions, have greater abilities to mobilize and informally relate to students (being outside the classroom), and can participate and organize in a wider range of issues. Basically, we can place much more emphasis on more involvement and support being an active organizations involved in practical activity.

Thus, we can see the complementary relationship between Asian Studies and Asian student organizations. Each plays a specific role and has its specific functions, but both can interact and cooperate to build even greater unity within the Asian movement.

### Student Organizations

Now, let us turn to discussing the nature and type of student organizations that we want to build. We mentioned the strength of the mass movement earlier. It is in this context that we must view the student organizations. They must be part of this movement, and take on a broad form, uniting the many progressive Asians on the campus. In this way, our ideas can reach the broadest sector of the student population and be linked with their interest and demands. This is extremely essential.

More concretely, we see the Asian student population generally categorized into three main types of groups: social, cultural and political. The gaps between these three types of organizations may seem insurmountable, but they are not. As student organizers, we must bring together these forces, and we can, for among them is a strong common basis of unity.

We must understand that Asians in America have experienced a common history of racial and national oppression. This oppression has resulted in two things: 1) it has divided Asians from each other, from other oppressed people, and from the larger society and it has stripped us of our cultural, social and political identity.

In reaction to this racial oppression, then, we see that Asians necessarily built unity in the three general forms. These material conditions, the oppression of Asians, formulate our basis of unity. We are all struggling against oppression, and it is this struggle which must build our strength and advance the Asian movement.

Now, some may ask, "How can we build this student movement?" What issues can we organize around to unify our brothers and sisters?"

### Issues and Answers

Presently, we see five main areas of work where Asians can concentrate their struggle: 1) campus, 2) community, 3) workplace/labor, 4) unity with the struggles of Asian countries and opposition to U.S. intervention, 5) women's struggles. It is vitally important to see these different struggles as part of one general movement, that of winning and protecting the rights of Asians in America and advancing the general mass movement.

The main area of work, naturally, is on the campus. We feel that students are best able to organize other students. This is because we share similar life styles and class backgrounds, are physically concentrated and have constant contact and interaction with each other, face similar conditions and share common problems in fighting for our education.

Many issues and problems face our campuses today. The gains we won during the Third World Strike are being attacked by the University. Budget cutbacks face many Asian Studies programs. Financial aids and Economic Opportunity Programs are being eliminated or reduced, and the right of child care facilities is being ignored.

Students must unite to resist and confront these cutbacks; they represent the general insensitivity of our government to the needs of Third World people. Only by organizing students can we defend our rights to a decent education.

Asian communities have always played an important role in raising the consciousness of Asians. Being the victims of oppression by our society, universal problems, such as immigration, redevelopment, inadequate low cost housing and medical care, exploitation in garment factories, government OEO cutbacks have dealt severe blows to various social service agencies. These cuts indicate a common source to many of the problems facing Asian in America.

### Communities

As students, we should link up and support all efforts to change the situation in our communities. We can do this by 1) building support committees on campus which organize and help bring the issue to other sectors of the population; 2) work with the community on campaigns around housing (International Hotel), redevelopment (C.A.N.E., the Committee Against Nihonmachi Eviction), budget cuts or other issues, and 3) fully integrating ourselves with the community, becoming an integral part of it, and working and organizing on a day-to-day basis.

In relating to the community, however, we must avoid taking moralistic or condescending attitudes towards our work. Also, we must have no illusions about merely serving the community - this could lead to a dangerous missionary attitude. We should take the attitude that it is we who must learn from the experience, and that we must work with, not for, our communities.

A third area of work is around working class or labor issues. This area may be quite vague to us, and some may question, "Why or how do we relate to these struggles?"

There are two separate aspects to this question. First, working people suffer similar oppression as students and in fact, face the most extreme exploitation in our society. Thus, they are the most advanced and progressive segment of society and must necessarily be at the vanguard of any movement for fundamental change. Thus, students must learn from working people. They are the makers of history.

Secondly, many students upon graduation will become workers and laboring people. Therefore, we must begin now to see that our involvement in the Asian movement must continue when we make this transition.

Because of these two aspects, we must begin to raise consciousness of working class struggles; we should expose the conditions in Chinatown (sweatshops and restaurants), and of Filipinos and Chicano farmworkers, of the strikign Chicano workers at the Farah plant, and many other issues.

### Asian Struggles

Fourthly, we must extend the unity of Asian Americans to Asians struggling throughout the world. Directly related to this is our opposition to US intervention in the internal affairs of other countries.

We stated before that the Vietnamese people's fight for self-determination is similar to our struggle at home. Their victory, and our role in support and solidarity, serves as an example for all of us here today.

This international solidarity is important because many nations are presently fighting for their independence. Concretely, our support of nations rights to self-determination means that we (1) demand an end to the bombing of Cambodia, (2) support the movement for national democracy in the Philippines and stringently denounce the present state of martial law, and (3) support the peaceful reunification of Korea.

We can raise these issues in many ways. In the past, film showings, cultural and social presentations of the various countries, slide shows, and other education forums have been very successful. Most important, though, is the need to reach broad sectors with our message. This is how change and action begins.

### Women's Organizing

Women's organizing work is one of the most important areas that we must begin to recognize. It is time that we all realize that for every movement to be successful a requirement is that the ideas, the creativity, the strength of our sisters be present. Not merely on a physical sense. Women should be treated as equals in every sense. Women should be in positions of decision making, to take on responsibilities, to develop fully. Women hold up half the sky.

The various areas that I have just discussed are hopefully concrete enough. We realize that it is difficult to include the wide spectrum of interest the audience tonight. We hope that the ideas being discussed are not too far flung. We hope that when we go back to our individual campuses, we begin to systematically analyze the material conditions in our areas or schools to begin to organize student organizations.

In closing I would like to say that we have a life time ahead of us. Let us cast no illusions. Let us deal with the problems of society at hand, the exploitations, the oppression, the human misery in the most affluent society in the world. Let us begin seeking solutions and begin to pinpoint the roots of these problems.

The task before us is a long and protracted one. But I'm confident that together we shall triumph.

## MAY FOURTH COMMITTEE SPEECH

Welcome to our May 4th Movement Celebration! May 4th, 1919 marks the beginning of the inspirational youth movement in China which has given leadership to youth all over the world. We would like to begin our program with a brief description of the May 4th Movement and its importance today.

The May 4th Movement was an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal, revolutionary movement. In the era of the May 4th Movement, China was dominated by imperialist powers which had divided China among themselves. At the end of World War I the victors--Great Britain, the US, France, Italy, and Japan met in Paris and decided to further divide China for their own gains. In particular, China's Shantung Province was given to Japan without strong protest by the Chinese government. This particular event sparked the beginnings of the May 4th Movement.

On May 4th, 1919, three thousand students held a mass meeting and demonstration in Peking's Tien An Min Square to protest this gross violation of China's national rights. *THIS DEMONSTRATION HAD A TREMENDOUS EFFECT ON ALL OF CHINA.* Starting in Peking, the students formed a nation wide student union. Many students left the campuses and went throughout China. The May 4th Movement became the first movement in China ever to link up the struggles of students and intellectuals with the masses of Chinese people (the workers and other patriots) to form a broad united front against the foreign domination by the imperialists and the oppressive system of feudalism. The enemy was barraged with the declarations of the masses: "Return our Tsingtao", "Protect our country's soil", "China belongs to the Chinese", "Self-determination", "Oppose power politics", and "Down with the traitors". Boycotts, sit-ins, shut-downs and strikes spread throughout China calling for the immediate return of the Shantung Province to the Chinese people.

China was a country wracked with feudal traditions. Another focus of the May 4th Movement was directed at the Confucian ethic (i.e. "...sovereign guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife." - presenting the oppression and exploitation of the masses of Chinese people as "natural laws" which could not be changed). The movement called for the development of a new cultural movement using the day to day

language of the people verses the old elite educational system. Further, the May 4th Movement called for the emancipation of women!

How can we learn from the May 4th Movement? Historically the same imperialist forces which ravaged China and other Asian countries throughout the 1800's and early 1900's are directly responsible for Asians coming to the US. At that time the US was in a period of rising capitalism. Chinese were kidnapped and forced into this country as semi-slaves to fulfill the need for cheap labor. Slave was a sensitive word during those years----instead we were called 'coolies'. Coolie labor dug the mines. When the mines were depleted, coolie labor was channeled to build the railroads, till the fields and work the canneries.

Because we were brought here only for our labor, Chinese women were excluded in an attempt to prevent our people from establishing ourselves in the US. At first, Chinese were dispersed throughout the west to wherever our labor was needed. Later with the Depression of 1873 and the rise of the anti-Chinese movement, Chinese were driven out of their homes and forced into ethnic communities. This movement culminated in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.

Later, other Asians were brought to the US to replace coolie labor. Japanese and Filipinos suffered similar oppression as the Chinese before them. Today, other peoples are being exploited for their labor. This illustrates how the exploitation of Third World people is inherent in the US economic system-capitalism.

The oppression of Third World people continues. We are denied our rights of adequate medical care, youth programs, quality education; and decent, low-cost housing. We are still exploited as cheap labor. Third World communities, such as Chinatown, are blatant examples of the oppression of our people.

Where there is oppression - there is resistance. Since our arrival to this country, Third World people have always struggled against our oppression. Your people have always played a key role in these struggles. Third World students on campuses have united with the struggles being waged in other sectors of society (community, workplace) and have supported the struggles of oppressed people around the world. Young people in our communities began to take up the struggles and the demands of the

community, and to link up their work with the struggles of all oppressed people.

Together, campus and community; American born and foreign born, youth have struggled along with other workers, professionals, and community residents for our rights such as low cost housing, adequate health care, and decent working conditions. Thus the Asian youth movement has its roots within the Asian movement and the movement of all Third World and working class people, to struggle against their oppression and unite to transform society.

The Committee to Celebrate the May 4th Movement is made up of campus, community, and working youth throughout the Bay Area. We are united around three principles:

1. Advance the spirit of the May 4th Movement and promote the commitment of youth to transform society:
  - a) Oppose racism and national oppression
  - b) Combat feudalistic ideas
2. To unite Asian youth on the campuses and in the community
3. Unite with the struggles of the Third World and working class people.

We thank everyone for joining us today in celebrating the 56th anniversary of the May 4th Movement.

THANK YOU

Comrades and Friends:

On behalf of I Wor Kuen, I would like to thank the Committee to Celebrate the May Fourth Movement for inviting us to speak today.

In commemorating China's May Fourth Movement, Chairman Mao stressed the need for youth and students to integrate themselves with the masses of working people, to struggle to transform our outlook and aspirations to serve the interests of the masses and their struggles to make revolutionary changes in society. In our presentation we would like to briefly relate some of these concepts to our situation in the US.

Asian youth have always played a positive role in the progressive and revolutionary movement. As shown by our participation in the anti-war movement, the struggles for Ethnic Studies, the I-Hotel campaign, young people have often been the first to recognize the need to change society, and to become actively involved. Through these struggles, too, we found that the root of the many problems in our society, ranging from unemployment to the exploitation of Chinese garment workers to lack of relevant education, lie in the inherent exploitative and unjust nature of the system of imperialism. From here, many of us committed ourselves to making fundamental changes in society, and to building a new socialist system based on the leadership of the working class.

What were the tasks of young people, and how best could we contribute to transforming society? This was the question on our minds.

Many young students who had begun to study Mao Tsetung Thought, correctly viewed the main task to be one of fully integrating and uniting with the masses of working people. As a result, wide sectors of youth left the campus and moved to the communities to live, work and struggle side-by-side with the masses of working people. This is how we put to practice the concept of uniting with the working class, and struggling with our old petty-bourgeois background and position. Only in this way could we effectively Serve the People. Integrating with the masses meant learning from the experiences and wealth of knowledge that the masses had accumulated throughout history. It meant struggling to understand the background and interests of the masses, and to respect and work with them collectively. It was through this process

that we realized that it was we, the so-called educated intellectuals, who were ignorant of social conditions, and that the masses of people were the knowledgeable ones. Another thing that integrating and uniting with the masses meant was to rely on the strength and unity of the masses as the basis leading factor in changing the community. We felt strongly about having faith in the masses in grasping revolutionary and progressive ideas and actions, and the ability of the masses to unite and organize themselves to change the conditions in the community. This concept has been proven true as exemplified by the active pro-China movement developed by the masses in Chinatown, the formation of community organizations like the Chinese Progressive Association and the Committee against Nihonmachi Eviction, and the many successful community struggles waged over the past years.

Uniting and integrating with the masses of working people also meant a sharp struggle with our own old class ideas, background and aspirations. We had to set out to re-mould our world outlook, to work in the interests of the working class. Specifically, we had to combat the tendency that saw students, with skills and talents acquired at the Universities, as somehow more advanced and above the level of the masses, and that students and professionals were the leading force in changing the community. Another attitude that we had to struggle with was individualism and selfishness. Integrating and uniting with the masses meant that we had to make sacrifices, to give up our privileges and comforts, and to think more of the collective needs and interests of the masses of working people.

These changes, and many others, reflected the necessity for young people to constantly struggle to change ourselves, our petty-bourgeois outlook and attitudes, in the process of participating in changing society.

We feel that the working class is the leading revolutionary class in society, and encourage young people to join the working class and become involved in their struggles. This, too, is part of putting the concept of integrating with the masses into practice. Over the past few months, labor issues like the Jung Sai garment workers strike and the Mandarin Restaurant workers issues has demonstrated the integral

role that the struggles of Chinese workers play in the fight against racism and the oppression of Third World people, and the exploitation of the entire working class, <sup>are</sup> key aspects in the revolutionary movement. Young people have been very active in supporting the struggles of working people, and have helped us combat the tendency to view working people as "menial; subservient labor", and to recognize that it is the labor of working people that creates all of the wealth of society.

- The process of joining the working class is not an easy or simple one, and involves a constant and thorough struggle within ourselves. From our experiences, two general <sup>views</sup> ~~views~~ have come up when youth have attempted to organize at the workplace.

The first one is for young people to adopt an idealistic, romantic view of the working class. They join the working class bursting with enthusiasm, and expect to organize their fellow workers quickly and jump into a strike or big struggle with the bosses. And although there is much activity and exchange of ideas at the workplace, they do not conform to the idealist conception of the young people. Unable to struggle against this idealism, it's very easy for young people to become demoralized, impatient, and they often drop out of workplace organizing completely.

- Another tendency is one of being somewhat hesitant or skeptical about integrating with the working class. Coming from petty-bourgeois, middle class backgrounds, some youth are not sure if they can struggle against their old ideas and desires, and vacillate on their willingness or ability to integrate with the masses, to become part of the working class.

Some principles we must follow when integrating with the working class are to 1) develop an objective understanding of the role of the working class, and the attitudes and interests of your fellow workers, 2) develop a patient, protracted attitude towards your work, viewing organizing as a long term process, 3) learn from the masses of people, and also study and apply the lessons of Marxism-Leninism Mao Tsetung Thought, and 4) carry on consistent struggle to change our outlook and transform our petty-bourgeois tendencies. We are confident that the overwhelming majority of youth who integrate with the masses will carry on this struggle to change society, to change oneself, and make strong contributions to the progressive and

Most of us here today express active concern to participate in changing and improving society, but not all of us have made a commitment to revolution or to building a socialist society. Many of us are just becoming involved and are still formulating our ideas and analysis of US imperialism, and deciding how we can participate and contribute to the process of social change. This is a good thing, and reflects the fact that each person must gather experiences and undergo personal struggle with one's ideas and questions, and that everyone goes through a process of developing our understanding and commitment.

For all of us though, I hope the talk has given us some direction for youth in the progressive movement, and some lessons that we can apply to our situation. In the final analysis, the struggle between the bourgeois and working class outlook, the choice we make as to whether or not to integrate with the masses and become involved in the mass struggles will determine the extent and manner of our contributions to the movement.

Dare To Struggle - Dare to Win.

Long Live the Spirit of the May Fourth Movement -

## Sum up Statement:

Today we have learned much about the May 4th Movement in China and have tried to discuss how it applies to our own work. What are the lessons we can learn from the 5/4 Movement? How can we use these lessons in our future work?

From the 5/4 Movement, we have learned how imperialist forces, together with the feudal forces of Old China, maintained an oppressive society where the masses of people suffered untold hardship and exploitation at the hands of a few. We have learned how those same imperialist forces played the dominant role in the coming of Asians to the United States and in creating the conditions of racism, national oppression, and exploitation which exist for Third World and working people today in this country. As in China in the 1900's, there is the urgent task of transforming society into a society free from exploitation and national oppression in the US today.

We have also learned that youth can play leading roles in the struggle to transform society. As young people, we are mobile, open to new ideas, and are often the first to question and criticize the injustices and inequalities that exist in society. In the 5/4 Movement, youth stood up defiantly to prevent further domination of China by foreign powers. The banner of "Down with the Confucian Shop" flew brightly in challenge of the 2,000 year old concepts of scholars above laborers and men above women, pushing the struggle for democracy forward in China.

The most important lesson we can learn from the 5/4 Movement is that youth alone cannot change society. We must link up with other Third World people, the working class, and all progressive people to build a broad united front in our struggle against imperialism.

How can we use these lessons in our future work, and build the Asian youth movement in the US?

First of all, Asian youth should become <sup>EVERYWHERE</sup> active on the campuses, in the communities, and at the workplaces.

National oppression, the oppression of women, and the exploitation of working people permeates every aspect of capitalist society. To be only aware of the problems and ills of our society is not enough, for things do not change by themselves. The

oppression which we face will be eliminated only through constant struggle.

In recent years, Asian youth, through active struggle, have accomplished a great deal. Asians and other Third World people have forced the educational system to create programs such as Ethnic Studies and the Equal Opportunity Program.

On our campuses, Asian Student organizations were formed to stand up for the rights of Asian students. In our communities we have organized struggles around low cost housing, police repression, and health care. The formation of organizations such as the Chinese Progressive Association, I Wor Kuen, the Committee Against Nigonmachi Evection, In Struggle, the J-Town Collective, the Union of Democratic Pilipinos (KDP), and many others demonstrates the continuing unity and commitment of Asian people to struggle for equality and justice. We have also helped to expose the role of imperialism in other Third World countries, such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Philippines, through organizations like the Bay Area Asian Coalition Against the War and movements like the Tiao Yu Tai Movement. And we were first to raise the five star flag of the People's Republic of China in Chantown, and to educate people about the nature of socialist China through the celebration of October First, China's National Day.

Today many social service programs which we have won through our own initiative and struggle are being threatened by the United States Government. In facing these cutbacks, we must remember that it is the masses of people who will struggle for our rights- we must not rely on "experts" to fight for us.

Historically, the Asian youth movement has been united around opposing national oppression. Our growing understanding of racism and oppression will help us in linking up with the struggles of all oppressed peoples, and building a broad united front to carry on our common struggle.

With our understanding deepening, we should reaffirm our commitment to change society, and to encourage others to be active. Recently, various Asian Student Unions and other Asian Student organizations organized a pilgrimage to Tule Lake, one of the concentration camps which during World War II imprisoned a total of 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry for four years. Over 250 people including students,

workers, and community people, want on the pilgrimage. A call was issued to "Build + the Asian Student Movement as an integral part of the Asian Movement". This pilgrimage reflects the growing unity of Asian students and is a giant step forward for the entire progressive and revolutionary movement in this country.

Let us increase communications and build greater unity among all honest forces seeking to build the Asian movement. We must commit ourselves to eliminating this decaying, oppressive economic and political system of imperialism and truly change society.

In closing, the Committee to Celebrate the May Fourth Movement would like to say that:

For those of us who are not yet active, "Let us Become Active!" For those of us who have been active, no matter how long, "Let us sum up our Practice, Analyse our Successes and Failures, Study and March Forward!" For those of us who feel that only our present individual projects are important, "Let us Learn from Past Struggles," like the May Fourth Movement and "Unite for Future Victories!"