

ASIAN - C/P/O ??

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ASIAN STUDENT MOVEMENT - by I Wor Kuen (Edited)

This pilgrimage is a significant event in the development of the young Asian movement. For the first time in several years, campuses throughout Northern California have consciously united, organized and coordinated a political activity of common concern and struggle. This pilgrimage is an inspiration for the future. It leads the Asian Student Movement (ASM) into a new era, an era when the ASM can once again be a powerful, united, and solid force in the progressive movement.

Our organization feels that the slogan for this pilgrimage is extremely appropriate, "Learn from past struggles- Unite for future victories." In this light we would like to present a brief history of the Asian Student Movement.

Our organization in some ways grew out of the Asian Student Movement. Many of us, (like myself was member of the Asian-American Political Alliance, Bay Area Asian Coalition Against the War, Third World Caucus at Laney College, Asian Student Union) were once students and active in the struggles on the campuses. There was a lot of struggle then, and a great many things were learned. Tonight we want to share some of these experiences and perspectives, and hope it can contribute to the Asian Student Movement's present organizing efforts.

What can we learn from the past? For one thing, and perhaps the most important, is that nothing comes without struggle! Many of the positions - such as support for the Indochinese people; participation in the struggles of Asian peoples outside of the campuses; the militant solidarity with other Third World peoples in the U.S.; the struggles for Ethnic Studies - did not come about without opposition. Correct positions develop in opposition to incorrect positions. Where we are today, the various Asian student organizations represented here tonight, as well as the various Asian revolutionary organizations also present here tonight, was able to be formed only in fierce struggles against many forces which opposed our formation. We are happy to say that the students have always played a positive and leading role in this process.

Robert

Chairman Mao in his "Orientation of the Youth Movement", said something which characterizes the role the ASM has played within the Asian movement. "What role", he asks, "have China's young people played since the May 4th Movement? In a way, they have played a vanguard role - a fact recognized by everybody except the die-hards. What is a vanguard role? It means taking the lead and marching in the forefront of the revolutionary ranks". Here in the U.S., the Asian Student Movement has in the past taken up this lead and in a way has played a vanguard role which ignited the Asian movement to take up it's responsibilities in the communities and the workplaces as a part of the overall revolutionary movement in the U.S.

To understand the Asian Movement and the Asian Student Movement in particular, we must analyse it's roots which grew out of the social and political climate of the 60's. A period when the very foundations of U.S. society shook as Black people across the country united to fight this unjust and sick system. The Black liberation movement progressed from the civil rights movement to a revolutionary stage with the then revolutionary Black Panther Party. This national liberation movement found reflection among the Asian peoples with the eventual formation of organizations such as the Red Guard Party and I Wor Kuen, community based revolutionary organizations formed to oppose and bring down the racist imperialist system as the only way to cure societies' ills. This could not happen over night. It took some time.

What role did Asian students play in all of this? Asian students were quick to grasp the ideas brought forth from the Black liberation movements. Molded by the nature of students and having the time and energy to be active, we began to explore new ideas and broaden our world outlook and we began to be open to revolutionary ideas - the Red Book and the red stars. As Chairman Mao stated "the young people are the most active and vital force in society. They are the most eager to learn and the least conservative in their thinking."

As a result, Asian students began to ask questions and to unveil the internal contradictions in American society to take up the responsibilities before us as students and youths in the U.S. Questions such as: Did we accept the concept of

the "model minority" successfully assimilated into the white society? Where were our historic, social, and cultural roots? Were we the victims of a long history of racism and national oppression in the U.S.? Many of us could see the oppression of our parents, their hardlives lived without much reward. Our communities were being destroyed or slowly strangled by a profit oriented system. Our people suffering without adequate health care, housing or food. The Asian students literally arose! We rejected the racist stereotypes imposed on us by the bourgeois society. Through organizations like the Asian-American Political Alliance leading the struggles for Asian Studies in the Third World Strikes, we demanded recognition and awareness of our history, cultures, contributions and problems. We demanded that the system provide basic facilities and services for our people. NOW!

Within the student movement, struggles erupted over "Where do we go from here?" "How do we achieve our goals?"

Many answers came forth to answer these questions. Two general trends developed.

Some students basically felt that the system could and would, with appropriate prodding and pushing, be forced into correcting the basic injustices of this system. They themselves also wanted to climb higher into the system. Therefore, they advocated that the Asian movement move basically in the direction of "changing the system from within". Within that context they tried to track the Asian movement into fighting primarily so that a few students, or ex-students could make it into the system. From there, in their "powerful" positions they could fight for our people.

Others of us rejected that direction and stressed instead that the system was fundamentally and inherently corrupt and that the only way to change it was from "without", from outside the imperialist system, by relying on our people and to ultimately make revolution so that this country would not be run by "a few for a few", but by those who really create the wealth in this society, the working and laboring peoples. We therefore encouraged students to move into the community, outside of the intellectual campuses, and merge with the masses to build a broad Asian movement.

We stressed support for the Vietnames, for the Black Panther Party, and serve the people by making revolution. We fought for Third World unity, solidarity with all oppressed people, to fight against the system as a whole.

*merge a community
a central role
of strike*

The infamous slogan we put forth was "Dare to Struggle -Dare to Win"!

On campuses, students throughout the country examined their educational system and in 1969 the Third World strikes thundered through the halls of the campuses for TW studies, open admissions and the end to the racist tracking system. In particular, the strike at San Francisco State was the longest student strike in U.S. history. The question posed to the student movement as a whole was, "Who do we rely on, to win this struggle?" Here the student movement found strength and power by relying on the support and participation of the masses and progressive forces, and not just famous figures or people found in strategic positions of power.

The strike was also important in breaking down students isolation on the campus. There was support from community organizations, teachers unions, striking workers, and progressive white organizations. Also, the link was made between campus struggles, the Farm Workers' struggles, and other progressive movements.

*was not
that
clear*

The victories of the TW strikes spread throughout the country. Ethnic Studies had become a reality, and programs from grammar school to the university level emerged. This was a concrete result in the struggle for the democratic rights of Asian and other TW people.

We won Ethnic Studies on the streets and on the campuses, against the sticks, batons, water cannons, tear gas, and guns of the police. But as soon as these programs formed, new tasks and struggles emerged, focusing on the future direction and development of Ethnic Studies.

Two roads could be taken - one down the path of conservative reformism, or up the path of progressive revolutionary change.

The conservative, reformist tendency felt that providing students with professional skills to "serve the community" was the answer. Students, from educated

intellectual backgrounds would lead the way to change, fostering a missionary and
condescending view of the masses as too backward.

This trend was vehemently opposed by the revolutionary and progressive students
who were beginning to recognize and study revolutionary ideology, mainly
Mao Tse-tung Thought.* They felt that Asian Studies should truly embrace the essence
of the concept of self-determination for Asian people and develop Asian Studies in
such a way that revolutionary ideas and changes could be promoted and grasped by
students to transform society. This struggle continued on various campuses within
various Asian Studies departments, with varying outcomes. Inherent in an academic
department were certain limitations which were impossible to overcome. The hopes
that revolution would be propagated from the classrooms of the nation's elitest
universities proved idealistic in some ways. This struggle for a revolutionary Asian
Studies proved mixed, with victory in some places and defeat in others. But no
place could A.S. be totally revolutionary. The struggle over the direction of Asian
Studies at Berkeley, at CCNY in New York, and other parts of the country is still
being waged today. For those of you still waging that struggle, we want to say that
we should learn from these past struggles and fight for Asian Studies to remain
autonomous, to serve the interests of the students and the communities and present
the truth about our history and present conditions.

In the late 60's and early 70's, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos waged relentless
battles against U.S. imperialism. Students, and in particular Asian students, played
a tremendous role in shutting down campuses across the nation in waves after waves
of protest. It was NO BUSINESS AS USUAL! At the Vancouver Women's Conference in
Canada, the Vietnamese representatives commended the Asian students for the role we
had played in mobilizing the American people to protest the actions of U.S. imper-
ialism in Indochina.

*From Mao Tse-tung Thought, later to Marxism-Leninism Mao Tse-tung Thought!

The positions taken by the ASM battled the dominant reformist political trend of the day. The slogans propagated by this reformist trend were "Out Now" and "Bring the Boys Home". The Asian movement realized these calls did not bring the political essence of these national liberation struggles in Asia and definitely would not bring an end to the war. So instead, the Asians put forth clearly and unflinchingly the support for the Vietnamese people and their leadership - the National Liberation Front (NLF) - as the only way to end the imperialist war. Our slogan called for "Victory to the Vietnamese", "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh - Dare to Struggle - Dare to Win !" Today, our analysis and stands have proven to be correct. The U.S. pulled the boys out, but the war waged on. ^{April 17,} Wednesday, Phnom Penn was liberated! and in a few weeks or even a few days Saigon will be next! Today Indochina reverberates with the victories of the Indochinese people over U.S. imperialism. We can be proud of the role Asian students have played!

in mind by the ASM

For the A.M. the war in Indochina had special significance in exposing the racist nature of the war and its link to U.S. imperialism and the national oppression of Asians in America. The slogan put forth by Asians "One Struggle - Many Fronts !" captured the essence of U.S. imperialist aggression at home and abroad.

Within the revolutionaries in the ASM other non-antagonistic contradictions revealed themselves, among others the struggle against male chauvinism. The full potential of the ASM was not felt. Men heavily dominated the political scene with women primarily responsible for taking notes, handling the phones, running off leaflets. The ideas held by some of the men were that the women were too chicken shit, not political, not aggressive enough to handle the political responsibilities of the ASM. These were attacked by many of the sisters. Women met and discussed how the question of women's oppression was linked up to society and how it was reflected in the A.M. Exposure to the roots and manifestations of sexism and the incorrect

attitudes held within the Asian movement, armed the women with the ability and confidence to oppose the oppression of women on all levels: organizationally, politically and even in personal relationship. Women began to take up the responsibility to provide political leadership to the movement. The ASM has made great accomplishments in this regard, but there is a great deal that needs to still be accomplished.

We need to be more sensitive to the particular oppression of women and the way it manifests itself. Women are insecure, and due to this insecurity sometimes becomes competitive even among women; we become not as sensitive as we should be in how to help each other become stronger so that we can all serve the movement better. Sisters should unite, help each other, combat all incorrect ideas among the brothers and among each other. This unity is bound to serve the interests of the movement as a whole.

To sum up this first period then, Asian students took up the struggle against racism and national oppression. ^{many anti-war?} The majoity of us recognized that real change can only be brought about through revolutionary struggle. At the end of this first period many students also recognized what Chairman Mao has said that "In the final analysis, the dividing line between revolutionary intellectuals and non-revolutionary or counter revolutionary intellectuals is whether or not they are willing to integrate themselves with the workers and peasants and actually do so."

This brings us to the second period in the ASM which we characterized by a whole generation of students leaving the campuses for the community to integrate with the daily life and movement of the masses. This move, while on the whole positive, was not without struggle. Some students had incorrect missionary type attitudes and saw themselves as "saving" the people. However the overwhelming majority went to the community to organize. ^{who towards what} We joined or helped form revolutionary organizations. ^{was this necessary what? all.} We developed "Serve the People" programs. We propagated ideas of socialism and TW unity and in general developed the anti-imperialist consciousness in the community.

At this time many of the major Asian student political organizations had dissolved. The movement on campus went up and down spontaneously with the development

of the anti-war movement. There was no conscious student movement during this period.

Lessons and errors from this brief period have not been summed up in a thorough way. The setbacks which ensued when many students left the campuses were great. A gap of about one year was drawn in the ASM. Some people tried to organize from within Asian Studies but this was very limiting, plus the fact that organizing solely inside A.S. departments tended to develop reformist politics and dependence on the bourgeoisie and not on the masses of people.

2 [Meanwhile, the students that had gone into the communities who had either joined or helped form many revolutionary organizations were undergoing transformation and rectification, learning and contributing to the struggle of Asian people on the jobs and in the communities.

For those of us who went this route, these last few years have been tremendously positive years. During these years, we have struggled to integrate ourselves with the masses. We have studied and attempted to grasp Marxism-Leninism Mao Tse-tung Thought and to apply it to the concrete situations facing our people, and we have tried to correct old bad attitudes which were residues from our student days. We wanted to become totally dedicated to the revolution and to the people. We wanted to combat any attempts to "make it" as individuals and within this process we did make errors, although on the whole this was a tremendously positive period.

Among the errors we made as that of a tendency towards being "anti-student". Ironically it was those members who had themselves come from a student background who spearheaded anti-student policies within our organization.

One manifestation was that we did not (and our organization accepts this criticism) sum-up it's past practice, contributions, mistakes, the weakness, and the political struggles waged in the ASM during this period and to try and understand the role students can play in the revolutionary movement. Students were turned away from the community unless they were ready to sacrifice their lives, right then and there. This was not an altogether bad thing, but there were and are alot of students

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who have not made the commitment towards revolution and have not gone through the process in struggle to reach this conclusion, especially when it was unclear what that meant. They were without a political organization to guide and develop the progressive energies and potential of students, until today.

We consider the present day ASM to be in the third period. With the formation of Asian student organizations, ie. Asian Student Union's, all across the country; a very important gap has been filled. Our organization has a lot of respect for the progress the Asian Student Movement is making today and hopes that the lessons that the past can be integrated with the work of the present student movement. We have tried in this speech to summarize some of those lessons and to present at least a broad outline of the history of the Asian Student Movement. Our organization was a part of it's history, sharing it's triumphs as well as contributing and participating in its errors. We hope that these lessons will help the present day Asian Student Movement. The Asian student organizations today are consciously reaching out to the broad masses of students. It is an active positive movement fighting national oppression, the administration, and consciously linking up with other progressive struggles in the work places, the communities, and national liberation struggles around the world, all of which objectively deal tremendous blows to U.S. imperialism. *DO WE CONSCIOUSLY LINK THIS UP*

The question of theory and practice is another important one. The present involvement of many students actively taking up the study of Marxism-Leninism Mao Tse-tung to guide the struggles of the ASM is very positive. The ability to grasp, apply in practice, and disseminate the conclusions, analysis, and methodology of MLMTT will firmly place the ASM on a good scientific foundation. I Wor Kuen encourages ^{this} and is actively helping to develop this process to "Put Politics in Command!" *han.*

In conclusion: The building of a strong unified ASM to transform society is not an easy task, it is a task which calls for intense political struggle to forge ahead in a strong unified way. It is a movement which cannot be isolated from the

rest of the American revolutionary movement, among the national minorities, the working class, and all oppressed peoples in America.

To all of us Chairman Mao has said:

"You young people, full of vigour and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning. Our hope is placed on you."

The 1975 Tule Lake Pilgrimage Committee has brought us together tonight. The task is here; let us take it up together.

DARE TO STRUGGLE - DARE TO WIN!