

THE LEAGUE OF REVOLUTIONARY BLACK WORKERS: ORGANIZING TO FIGHT BACK WITH A PEDAGOGY OF REVOLUTION

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***Abstract:** In the late 1960s, a group of Black autoworkers in Detroit, Michigan were organizing to form the League of Revolutionary Black Workers using Marxist principles. They organized because as Black workers there was no place for them in the United Auto Workers Union and the only place for them in the factory was performing the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs. As a radical Black organization in the late 1960s, they were identified as criminal elements and experienced surveillance at the hands of their employers and the police and were investigated by the FBI and the IRS. Copious records were kept on them by these institutions of social control allowing for the analysis of their experience of radical organizing against the white union, the auto companies, and ultimately white patriarchal capitalism. Their aim was to promote a critical consciousness among Black workers primarily and all workers secondarily with the immediate goals of safer working conditions, better pay, job opportunities, and representation and with long-term goals of ending capitalism. In effect they created a pedagogy of revolution to fight against their oppressors. This paper examines the historical resistance of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and their response to working and surviving within an oppressive capitalist system under police surveillance.*

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1960s, a group of Black autoworkers in Detroit, Michigan were organizing to form the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (hereafter LRBW) using Marxist principles. They organized because as Black workers there was no place for them in the United Auto Workers Union and the only place for them in the factory was performing the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs. Situated within U.S. hegemonic capitalism, the LRBW struggled against racism and class exploitation within the socio-historic conditions of Detroit and the American auto industry. Through their struggle they confronted both racism and class exploitation.

As a radical Black organization in the late 1960s, they were identified as criminal elements and experienced surveillance at the hands of their employers and the police and were investigated by the FBI and the IRS. Copious records were kept on them by these institutions of social control allowing for the analysis of their experience of radical organizing against the white union, the auto companies, and ultimately white patriarchal capitalism. This study examines a pedagogy of revolution, in relation to the objective material conditions of the historical moment, through the organizational and political trajectory of a certain section of the LRBW. The study

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seeks to understand the organizational process as a means to shed light on actions they took to protect themselves from the state represented by police and company surveillance. The research questions can be understood as revolving around the thematic and conceptual area of pedagogy of revolution: namely the organizational (practical development), the political (strategic and tactical development) and the reflexive process of theory and practice. In terms of understanding their trajectory within the framework of oppression, they developed both defensive and offensive actions to avoid being taken into the criminal justice system, even though they constantly confronted it.

The LRBW was informed intellectually and ultimately organizationally through their embrace of theory and their political practice. The unity of theory and practice is the feature that allowed them to identify and implement a pedagogy of revolution in relation to the developing objective conditions of their historical moment. Their aim was to promote a critical consciousness among Black workers primarily and all workers secondarily with the immediate goals of safer working conditions, better pay, job opportunities, and representation and with long-term goals of ending capitalism. In effect they created a pedagogy of revolution to fight against their oppressors. This paper examines the historical resistance of the LRBW and their response to working and surviving within an oppressive capitalist system. The importance of examining the LRBW is in learning from their experience as an example of a community resisting the capitalist system as represented by the auto factories, the union, and the police.

This study of the LRBW was developed as a process of pedagogy as it points to deep analysis of the realities and problems faced by a section of society engaged in resistance and how they were able to identify an area for contestation of power and to seek a solution for the resolution of that problem. As a pedagogical process it consists of both short and long term strategies and tactics in the movement of working towards transformation of both the objective and subjective material conditions within which the LRBW found themselves as autoworkers in Detroit struggling against corporate and state actors.

In the late 1960s, the Black population of Detroit found themselves policed by a majority white police department. Georgakas and Surkin cite a Police Community Relations Sub-Committee staff memo from 1968, which notes that the Black community saw this as a form of occupation by white outsiders ([1975] 1998: 156). Additionally police officers were known to be racist and they document many instances of police brutality and violence (Georgakas & Surkin [1975] 1998; Scott 2013).

ORGANIZATIONAL (PRACTICAL DEVELOPMENT) PROCESS

In the 1967 Detroit riots, Black men learned that they were exempt from the city curfew and that the police would let them pass, if they had a work I.D. from one of the auto factories. The city might be shut down and civil liberties suspended, but the auto factories would remain open and the state would protect business interests (Scott 2013). This realization, of the intersection of power, economics and Black workers bodies was a crucial step in the organization of the LRBW and their strategy and tactics. General Baker, a key figure in the movement notes:

When we came out of the rebellion, we surmised that the only place at that time particularly that young Blacks had any value to society was at the point of production. And that's why

we took up the task of trying to organize workers at the point of production that led to the DRUM [Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement] and to the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in the 1960s (Baker 2003).

Importantly, the political, social, and economic climate of Detroit had laid the material conditions for that development and “it came into existence as a reaction to the spontaneous self-organizing of Black workers” (Ahmad n.d.). Once the spontaneous movement had begun, it was revolutionary consciousness that remained to be raised by a cadre organization. In an internal document, the LRBW note:

It was clear that great potential for organizing Black workers in Detroit . . . existed. This capacity to build a workers organization committed to struggle against racism, capitalism, and imperialism mandated the formation of a cadre organization, uniting conscious Black workers and professional revolutionaries to give direction and leadership to this struggle (LRBW 2004: 6).

The founders of the LRBW had already been in contact for many years going back to the early 1960s. “General Baker, John Watson, and others were involved in groups at Wayne State that would meet and fall apart” (Hamlin 1994: 86). Mike Hamlin along with General Baker and John Watson started the *Inner City Voice* around 1967 (Hamlin 1994: 86). Of this initial group Baker and Wooten would be those that both worked within the auto plants and who would come to be identified as the leaders of the workers section of the LRBW. This, according to Petras, is one of the main requirements for being a revolutionary. He writes: “the capacity to act effectively as a serious, committed (“professional”) revolutionary presupposes insertion within a network of solidarity and joint activity, at the point of production or within a mass front” (Petras 2007: 53). The evidence points towards General Baker as being the main force behind the workers section of the LRBW and even of the involvement of the autoworkers in the first place (Ahmad n.d.; Scott 2013).

The publication of *The Inner City Voice* is one of the two main catalysts, which were important to the origin of the LRBW. The second is that Black workers at Dodge Main (Hamtramck) began organizing and holding meetings (Geschwender 1977: 87). Geschwender and Jeffries link the publication of *The Inner City Voice* to John Watson in September of 1967 and the caucuses of the Black workers to the same time period (2006: 137). Through the publication of the paper, the process of communication and the implementation of a network that would later result in the creation of the first DRUM, the foundation for the LRBW began. As Hamlin another key figure remembers: “we took our paper, which called for revolution, out to the plants and distributed it” (Hamlin 1994: 87). Additionally, the paper served as a means to educate both LRBW members and the larger community about acts of aggression by the police against the Black community, including news on ongoing court cases both locally in Detroit and across the U.S. (*Inner City Voice* 1970).

The aforementioned core group moved on to either become students at Wayne State University or to become workers employed in the auto factories (Geschwender 1977: 88). Geschwender cites May 1968 as the key moment in the organization of the LRBW. It was at this time that “nine Black production workers from Dodge Main joined together with the editors of *The Inner City Voice* to create DRUM” (Geschwender 1977: 88; Geschwender & Jeffries 2006: 138). Hamlin, a key member remembers:

We decided to use the newsletter as a means of organizing the workers in that we could establish a means of communication among the workers throughout the plant. We wrote about incidents, events and conditions of racism, brutality, and other kinds of bad working conditions, which began to build a sense of resentment among the workers and began to develop a sense of unity among them (Hamlin [1970] 1997: 193).

The use of *The Inner City Voice* as an organizational tool proved efficient and through it, the organization began to grow. Kramer, one of the women members, remembers how she was recruited:

In the late '60s I worked for the West Central Organization [WCO] . . . Around 1967, folks like General Baker and Clayton Dowdell. . . started coming around to WCO. . . They were putting out leaflets from DRUM. . . We also had started to read *The Inner City Voice* [ICV]. I got recruited to help type up articles for the paper and started hanging out at the ICV office (Kramer 1994: 103).

Georgakas and Surkin ([1975] 1998) place a lot of emphasis on *The Inner City Voice*, a Detroit newspaper under the direction of editor John Watson and a core group of thirty Black activists including General Gordon Baker, Mike Hamlin, and Ron March, leaders of a DRUM wildcat strike of 4,000 workers, which shut down Dodge Main on May 2, 1968.

But with the success of the newspaper, they attracted attention. By this point, they were under surveillance by the police and FBI, and they began to feel the pressure of the state to stifle their efforts at organizing Black workers and the larger Black community as they were identified as a more active threat. The newspaper came under FBI and union harassment. Georgakas illustrates the level of pressure placed on the LRBW, “the FBI or the police department would visit the printer and explain that if the printer produced another paper, various government agencies would be back to look into every detail of the printing operation” (Georgakas 2002). Eventually, the pressure was sufficient to force them to find alternative printing presses in Chicago (Georgakas 2002).

DRUM came about as a result of the United Auto Workers (UAW) leadership complying with company demands and their failure to represent Black workers. This might well have been the end of the story had it not been for a new element, a quarter of a million Black workers most at Chrysler, who were employed to do the worst and most dangerous jobs. Attacks against workers such as the ninety-day rule, sick notes, racism against Blacks, and Arabs, and even against White Appalachians showed that the company and the union had lost touch with the workers. It was in response to these conditions that “The RUMs [Revolutionary Union Movements] were organized to fight discrimination in the plants and in the larger society” (Baker 2003).

DRUM concentrated on organizing Black workers, citing such attacks on workers as the unaccountability of UAW officials, discriminatory hiring, unsafe machinery, time studies, exclusion of Blacks from skilled trades, speed-up, holdups in pay, short paychecks, harassment over sick leave, and regimentation of plants (Georgakas & Surkin [1975] 1998). Watson, a key member, examined how the LRBW confronted these issues in an interview:

We find that the basic things that are necessary in terms of organizing a plant are, first of all, a clear understanding of the needs of the workers and the kinds of problems which they

are facing in the plant; second, an ability to articulate those needs and to set forth demands which can begin to solve those problems and third, the establishing of a mechanism, an organizational structure which can effectively mobilize the workers to resist the pressures of the company and the union (Watson 1969: 3).

The motivation for and the means by which, they organized to resist the auto factories and the union also would help them resist surveillance by the police.

On May 2, 1968 a wildcat strike occurred at Dodge Main. In retaliation, seven people were fired. Eventually five of the seven were rehired with the exception of General G. Baker, Jr. and Bennie Tate. It was around this wildcat that the workers and the editors decided that it was necessary to organize and fight (Geschwender 1977: 89). The firing of General Baker is cited as a catalyst for DRUM and he is also referred to as the “soul of DRUM” (*Motor City Voices* cited in Geschwender 1977). Later in July 1968, another wildcat strike took place. Lasting three days, it halted production in the Chrysler plant. Although the demands were not met; this strike was seen as a success in terms of achieving two goals: the creation of solidarity among participating Black workers, and the conditions for promoting political education (Geschwender 1977: 92-3).

General Baker and Chuck Wooten (in-plant DRUM organizers) were the guiding force as far as the rest of the Black workers were concerned inside the LRBW. . . Clayton Dowdell, who organized most of the community support for DRUM and the League until his forced exile to Sweden in August 1969. Baker and Dowdell had both been members and leading cadre in Detroit RAM and had worked together for years. The incorporation of Ken Cockrel, Mike Hamlin, John Watson and John Williams into the leadership of the League was due to the fact that they had administrative and other technical skills needed to coordinate an expanding semi-spontaneous Black workers’ movement (Ahmad n.d.).

DRUM served as an organizational form, which was then copied by other Black workers at other auto plants. Soon FRUM, the Ford Revolutionary Union Movement, and ELRUM, the Eldon Avenue Revolutionary Union Movement, were formed using DRUM as a model (Geschwender 1977: 94; Geschwender & Jeffries 2006: 141). Eventually, more than a dozen RUMs formed and were incorporated into the LRBW from not only the auto industry, but also from hospital workers, journalists, and students.

The above excerpt also sheds light on Dowdell as an interesting case regarding the ability to create a defensive strategy for addressing radical criminology. Although he had a history of petty crime, he was also a community organizer and artist. During the riot of 1967 “the police destroyed his art gallery and he was shot at several times” (Georgakas & Surkin [1975] 1998: 121). Due to his particular circumstances and his personal history as a politically engaged and targeted individual he was able to flee the U.S. as a political refugee in Sweden. He is interesting specifically because of his involvement with the LRBW, but also for the fact that he established a “Solidarity Committee in Sweden” (Georgakas & Surkin [1975] 1998: 121).

The Revolutionary Union Movements continued to be replicated across Detroit and the nation. This led to the conclusion that a central organization was necessary to provide a unified direction; and the LRBW was formed, serving “as an integrative body coordinating general policy, political education, and the strategies for its various components” (Geschwender 1977: 95; Geschwender & Jeffries 2006: 142). The LRBW became the revolutionary organization,

the cadre for the RUMs. This step in the organizational process occurred in June 1969 (Geschwender & Jeffries 2006: 142). Geschwender and Jeffries note that the central staff was at one point as many as eighty members; and they identify the executive board as consisting of: Mike Hamlin, Luke Tripp, John Watson, General G. Baker, Jr., Chuck Wooten, John Williams, and Kenneth Cockrell (2006: 142). They expressed their understanding of organizing workers as members of communities. Once, DRUM became visible, other groups of Black workers also began organizing and coming to DRUM for guidance on how to do so.

It was these subsequent RUMs that led to the formation of the LRBW as a means to address their requests for assistance. But the incorporation of the RUMs into the LRBW also served as a means of protection from the forces mobilized by the state and the corporations against them. As Baker points out, the organization of the LRBW was a response to the attacks by police and the criminal justice system.

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers was formed after the Eldon strike in 1969. It was an amalgamation of little groups. Under a fierce frontal attack from the police and courts, we were forced to pull all the community organizations and plant groupings together under some kind of general command (Baker 1994: 309).

The LRBW organized as a form of defense to provide protection for themselves as Black workers from the forces of capitalism and the state that were being mobilized against them. As a result, the LRBW developed a unique organizational structure. Part of the reason for this was to be able to coordinate their defense and to pool resources.

It was structured into compartments, which had a semi-autonomous character. The compartments were broken down into membership and circulation committee, and editorial committee, and an intelligence/security committee. All committees were directly responsible to the central committee known as the executive committee. The central staff was a body of League constituent cadres under the executive committee and was responsible for the day-to-day activities of the League (Ahmad n.d.).

This organizational model, consisted of many different worker and community organizations including, students, parents, lawyers, Black police officers and eventually their own resources such as media and communication. As can be seen, they organized in such a way to engage in struggle both inside and outside the system. One key aspect of their organizational strategy was that they specifically and consciously had no leader, but a central committee for administration. The autonomy of the RUMs and sub committees was designed so that unlike organizations such as the Black Panthers, there was no single individual who could be targeted to destroy the organization (Scott 2013).

DRUM bred other RUMs and The LRBW was born. The umbrella organization was incorporated in June of 1969. At its peak it had a central staff of about eighty persons. It sought to create a multilevel apparatus similar to the one it sought to destroy. It expanded to include a youth section in local high schools, Black Student United Front. It managed to receive some funding from BEDC – the Black Economic Development Conference. The Black Manifesto of the BEDC and their funding, allowed the LRBW to create Black Star Publishing under Mike Hamlin, as a way to further their reach (Georgakas & Surkin [1975] 1998; Kelley 2002: 122).

Harvey identifies three main points regarding urban revolution as they have emerged historically. The ability of the LRBW to meet these three points can explain how they progressed in time, but also how they managed to protect themselves from the company, union, and state actors moving against them. The first that he identifies is that the success of worker based struggles depends on how much support they can garner from the community at large (Harvey 2012: 138). The LRBW never conceived of itself as anything but an organization rooted within the larger community. As Watson, one of the key members of the central committee wrote:

In conjunction with the organization of workers in plants you automatically have the development of community organization and community support. After all, workers are not people who live in factories 24 hours a day (Watson 1969: 4).

Another means for gaining community support was the move to gain the support of the wives of the workers. Kramer, one of the key women involved remembers:

We were not the typical women in the NOW movement. A lot of us got pulled into the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and we were its backbone . . . A lot of the men in DRUM were catching hell from their wives for participating in the struggles. The wives were concerned about their husbands being fired. General Baker and others formed a committee to politicize and get the wives involved in the fight (Kramer 1994: 103).

The second main point identified by Harvey is that the participants in revolution, or those who are considered to be part of the working class must expand beyond the limitations of industrial factory workers and must include all working people (Harvey 2012: 139). The LRBW eventually came to the conclusion that workers included all peoples that were oppressed and were not members of the owning capitalist elite and its state supporters. Kramer remembers this issue on where to organize and focus their efforts:

There was debate [as to] where the struggle had to be. One faction said that the focus should be in the plants, at the point of production. I said, "Yes, but all those men got to come back into the community; they live somewhere. We've got to be organizing in both places" (Kramer 1994: 104).

The third and final point that Harvey identifies is that although labor value should remain central to the struggle, it also must be expanded to include value that is produced in space and in the city (2012: 140). This was accomplished throughout the program of the LRBW as it addressed racism and the value of Black versus White workers, the importance of Detroit as the industrial hub, and the Black workers as central to the process of production. Cockrel, a lawyer, who worked defending the LRBW in court and who in many ways, was the voice of the LRBW when they encountered the court system stated:

We do not simply define workers in the orthodox sense of he who toils laboriously with his hands over a lathe or on the line, or in the trim shop or in the frame plant or in the foundry. We say that all people who don't own and rule and benefit from decisions, which are made by those who own and rule are workers (Cockrel 1970: 12).

The LRBW though initially organizing Black workers at the point of production grew quickly to include other aspects of Black working people and their communities. The Black Student

United Front (BSUF), is often overlooked in discussions of the LRBW, but grew to provide an invaluable service to the LRBW. The student faction grew to become “a city-wide Black student movement developed in the high schools and colleges and [which] affiliated themselves with the League” (Ahmad n.d.). The BSUF developed into not only a means of growing the organization but also for providing an educational platform for the next generation of conscientized Black workers. Most significantly was the use of youth as a strategic move to avoid surveillance. Baker explains:

We solicited the help of youth to leaflet plants in the morning so that workers would be protected from being fired. The students took the same tactics back to the schools. We ended up giving political guidance and leadership to a broad-based Black student united front in high schools and community colleges in Michigan and Detroit (Baker 1994: 309).

The youth organization also performed an aspect of a pedagogy of revolution, as lessons learned in one context were applied to the next. The youth were just as dedicated to the revolutionary project as the Black autoworkers were. Baker elaborates:

We had some youth that helped us pass out our little DRUM leaflet because if you went to the plant and passed out a leaflet, security guards would come out and take a picture of you, bring you to the office and file a discharge. So we went and got high school kids and they would get up at 5:30 in the morning and come out and pass out our leaflets . . . When school started back . . . they went back to their high schools and organized. They organized chapters in . . . Black Student United Front . . . 16 high schools, 4 junior highs, and 1 elementary. They took the same organizing tactics back to school and organized them. They actually became the base of support for our workers movement (Baker 2003).

The LRBW did not stop with students. They sought to reach a wider audience and “Finally Got the News,” a film produced by their own Black Star Productions and the New York Newsreel (Black Star Productions 1970), a radical filmmaker’s collective, was one of their methods. The film was designed as a tool of political education and propaganda. The film highlights instances of exploitation as workers, and specifically, as Black workers and frames the analysis using Marxist ideas. They identify themselves as members of the working class (producers) and their exploitation and class struggle against union led management: co-owners of the auto plants (capitalists). They also point out the reason for the creation of DRUM as being based on grievances of the workers in reaction to a speed-up in the Dodge plant.

In the film they identify themselves as fighting two distinct struggles: on the one hand, fighting against the corporations as representatives of capital and on the other hand fighting against the United Auto Workers as both maintaining status quo in regards was racism and in selling out and working for management. It is “with union and management in bed together, workers had nowhere to turn for grievances” (Black Star Productions 1970). The film also identifies the presence of the repressive state apparatus through “police violence in collusion with corporations” (Black Star Productions 1970). They link racism on the part of White workers and the unions to the oppressive conditions of capitalism and the fear of these White workers and union members of losing the little they had. Through this process, they identify racism as a part of the daily life and ideology growing from the base of the capitalist economy. They show how racism is used to divide workers and to confuse and distract White people about the real class enemy (Black Star Productions 1970). The film also makes important connections to

how their struggle is not an isolated struggle, but one, which is related to other Black struggles in the U.S. and other struggles throughout the world (Black Star Productions 1970). This ability to connect themselves to larger processes moving against capitalism is one of the ways that they are able to situate themselves and direct their purpose. By making use of media such as film and newspapers, the LRBW was not only growing their organization and recruiting new members or explaining their politics. Additionally, by making themselves visible and presenting themselves rationally, they were building a network of support that served to legitimize themselves in the larger public, specifically within Detroit, and to protect themselves from the police through that legitimacy.

The LRBW also understood, that the struggle had to be fought on many levels both within and without the system. Instead of being always on the defensive, they realized the importance of being offensive as well. They imagined not simply a response to police, union, and company violence but grasping the power of these institutions and turning it to their own needs. Cockrel explains:

We also understand that the only way that you end oppression . . . is to run the police department, is to run the city. So we say we're committed to running the city, in order to do this we've got to develop a political machine (Cockrel 1970: 13).

Instead of making a spectacle in the courtroom, they wanted to control the courtroom, and the police, and the judge and the jury (Georgakas & Surkin [1975] 1998).

POLITICAL (STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL DEVELOPMENT) PROCESS

One of the LRBW's greatest strengths was its study and use of theory. The LRBW formed study circles and cadre whereby they themselves became intellectuals actively engaging with Marxist-Leninist texts as well as their links to the petit bourgeois student members who separated after the split with the workers. Study gave them focus in their purpose and tools for achieving their goals.

It was through the process of the urban Black working class with rural roots coming into their own intellectual development with the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements that individuals such as General Baker came to the conclusion "You figure out if I'm gonna be here then we've got to change these things. We have to make this place a place that's livable" (Baker 2013). This led to the political development of individual members of the LRBW. Baker explains how this worked:

We took direct action fight to the factories. All our tactics were direct action struggles: demonstrations, leafleting, agitation. Strikes at the shops were based on the question of discrimination, the way we were treated as Black workers by supervision, by the medical center, by our ability to get skilled trade positions or supervisory positions. DRUM [Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement] was formed in May 1968 by a group of Black workers that had come together after various strike struggles and discharge cases. We put out a little weekly newspaper that was consistently trying to mobilize workers in the shops. . . People started demanding that we take some action. That led to little rallies out at the back of the plant, then to demonstrations, then to the first strike (Baker 1994: 308).

This is the process through which the working class engaged in struggle. But as they grew they attracted the attention of the state. “The Detroit police observed and investigated the League, engaged in covert surveillance, and concluded that the League was subversive” (Geschwender 1977: 121). Records show that the police tailed them from home, to work, to meeting, in essence everywhere they went (Black Studies Research Sources 2004). Edna Watson remembers this surveillance: “The casualness of the FBI and the FBI’s animosity . . . their visits and interrogations were intimidating and chilling” (Edna Watson in Georgakas & Surkin 1998: 221).

Those workers who engaged in study, were later able to take a step back and place this political struggle within a larger context. Kramer explains her understanding of this larger context:

The workers will fight back but it takes the United States working class a long time to understand something. And once they begin to understand it they will move. The workers eventually began to see their strength. UAW began to see the strength of the workers (Kramer 2013).

But this clarity was to come much later after years of engagement. Initially, the political program of the LRBW addressed racism and exploitation by the state, the corporations, and the union. This underlies the focus of the LRBW to educate of Black workers. Writing in the *Inner City Voice*,

[We, the LRBW, are] devoted to the Black Masses understanding and particularly the Black Worker understanding of how the economic situation in this country will affect not only his job and family livelihood, but also the political and social conditions in which we as Black people and Workers will find ourselves (League of Revolutionary Black Workers [1970] 2004: 5).

This attention to economic, social and political conditions lends itself to an explanation of a pedagogy of revolution. Through study of the economic, political, and social realities faced by Black workers the LRBW developed what Freire referred to as a “literacy of cultural politics” (Freire & Macedo 1987). This political agenda then was used to implement strategies and tactics for their revolutionary work. Tripp, a member of the central committee explains:

The educational policy of the program of DRUM is to cultivate a firm and correct political orientation, and industrious and pure style of work, and flexible strategy and tactics. These are three essentials in the making of an anti-racist revolutionary worker. It is in accordance with these essentials that the leadership of DRUM teach[es] and the workers study (Tripp 1969: 5).

The LRBW took their educational program seriously as can be seen by the amount of time and energy spent creating and organizing it. For the LRBW the pedagogy of revolution was tied to their educational program. The LRBW by implementing an educational program with the goal of raising the class-consciousness of Black workers was primarily focused on creating educational materials and distributing them to the widest audience possible of Black workers. In an internal document, they explain their purpose in education:

The responsibility of developing an organ or newspaper to agitate, propagandize and extend the correct line of struggle is a clear task of proletarian revolutionaries, which necessitates

the acquisition of resources with which to print, publish, and disseminate the materials to carry on the task of proletarianizing the people through education and propaganda (League of Revolutionary Black Workers 2004: 10).

It is the necessity of agitation and propaganda as a means of raising the consciousness of the working class that made the importance of the media and communication tools so important to the LRBW and to their pedagogy of revolution. “Literacy . . . is . . . the precondition for engaging in struggles around both relations of meaning and relations of power” (Giroux 1987: 11). Literacy of course in the context of social struggle is not simply being able to read and write, but the ability to read and write social struggle on the social fabric.

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers must educate and politicize Black workers to the nature of U.S. society on a consistent and determined basis. We must advance the line that Black workers are the vanguard sector of the proletariat and the only social sector capable of leading a social revolution in this country (League of Revolutionary Black Workers [1970] 2004).

The LRBW understood however, that in order to move the masses of Black workers forward towards revolutionary goals and objectives that they had to work locally within a specific context. As Cockrel said:

the responsibility of politically serious people to recognize what’s going down where they find themselves, because that’s where they’ve got to do work (Cockrel 1970: 5).

Hamlin also expressed a similar idea, in the connection between education and movement goals, commenting: “We wanted to educate people to do what was to be done” (Hamlin 1994: 88). Political education needed to be done in such a way however, that it was useful, not only in terms of directing action, but also in terms of building solidarity and legitimacy in relation to preparing to be under police and company surveillance. The teaching of political theory had to be accompanied with practical lessons in law and direct action.

The beginning of the end for the LRBW politically is tied to the changes in the economy. At the very moment that they were organizing, Black workers were no longer as necessary to the plants and they began to be laid off. This occurred at practically the same moment that the LRBW was organizing. The economic turn of the late 1960s and early 1970s had disastrous consequences for the LRBW. In the auto factories, the “young Black militants” lost their jobs and therefore the LRBW and the RUMs lost members and movement potential (Foner 1974: 421).

Remarkably, all through their revolutionary work: educating and organizing, they were able to maintain a level of independence and anonymity that protected them as individual members. Their organizational method of a decentralized hierarchy kept individuals out of the limelight while guaranteeing the success of the LRBW in the case of a political decapitation (Georgakas 2000: 23). They attracted the attention of the auto plants, the UAW, the police, the FBI, and the IRS, but managed through their networks and community organizing to obtain the resources to protect themselves. The decentralized hierarchy also meant that the police did not have a specific individual target. Cockrel illustrates the success of their organizational strategy in terms of protecting themselves from the police and the state:

We say that the League of Revolutionary Black Workers is a serious organization with a serious program that has been consistently working over the years and we point proudly not to the numbers of persons that we have in jail, not to the numbers of persons that we have under indictment. We point proudly to the fact that we have functioned as a serious revolutionary organization for years and we have not one man in jail (Cockrel 1970: 6).

This does not mean that it was always smooth sailing as members such as Baker had to leave Detroit for periods of time when things got to hot (Scott 2013).

The LRBW like many revolutionary organizations began by demanding reforms. In their case, those demands were in the area of worker safety and racism. By challenging the corporations, the union, and the capitalist system, they came under the target of many state agencies. The state after all is a tool of the capitalist class. Baker explains what it was like being a target of the state:

We were under such harassment and intimidation by the police, FBI, Internal Revenue Service that personally I never did think we were going to live very long. We had too many close calls. Fred Lyles . . . was head of the United Tenants Union and was shot and paralyzed right after the Dodge strike. We thought the shot basically was aimed for me. We were standing together in the office on Grand River. Fred and I were talking and we just moved and the shot rang out from somewhere across the street. You didn't sleep the same place most nights. You just tried to build whatever organizational strength you could and educate as many workers as you could to try to keep the struggle on course (Baker 1994: 310).

As can be seen from Baker's comments, there was reason for the members of the LRBW to be fearful and wary. But in many ways that fear of an oppressive racist state made their work all the more important.

By 1973, the working class section of the LRBW had learned many lessons. These had led to the development of class-consciousness through years of theoretical study and organizational practice. Petras points out that this occurs continuously through "a repressive state, fluctuations of the economy and of state economic policy, oppressive social relations of production" (2007: 47). This constant struggle had led the LRBW to make certain conclusions about the best ways to continue in working towards revolutionary social change. Baker acknowledges that even though the LRBW became defunct many of its members continued in the larger movement.

By 1974 we decided that we needed a national party that could assess the situation we just come through and because most of the earlier syndicalist groupings had gone as far as they could. The Communist Labor Party was formed in 1974 (Baker 1994: 310).

Ultimately, they made the decision to consolidate with other area organizations and to join a national movement organization. In this process, they learned that the struggle is a marathon and not a sprint. Scott, an identified leader of the 1971 wildcat strike, summarizes how they began to envision the long-term commitment to social change:

We don't just understand the fight that we are in today, and that fight is very important, but we also try to understand the long-range fight that can sustain you from fight to fight. So the big lesson was for us not only must you have short-term goals, but you also have to have long-term goals and you have to have an ability to understand the connection between the short-range goals and the long-range goals (Scott 2011).

In analyzing the lasting impact of the LRBW, Georgakas identified seven elements of what he calls “the core legacy of the LRBW (2000: 18). The first was their capacity or ability to be “agile, clever, and direct in framing issues” (Georgakas 2000: 18). This stemmed from their understanding and analysis of who was at fault for the circumstances of the historical moment in which they found themselves (Georgakas 2000: 20). The second element is that the leadership had political experience and collectively decided to focus their organizing skills on the Black working class (Georgakas 2000: 21). The third element was its use of newspaper media as “a rallying point for action” and as a means to produce the cultural ideas of the organization (Georgakas 2000: 22). Georgakas identifies a sub-element of their culture: “multi-leadership” (2000: 23). He points out that the LRBW was extremely cautious and made sure that there was never an identifiable leader in order “to prevent decapitation” (Georgakas 2000: 23). The fourth element is that the LRBW “respected the power of the police” (Georgakas 2000: 23). The fifth element was their ability to gain control of “state and community resources” such as the newspaper at Wayne State (Georgakas 2000: 24). The sixth element is their ability to network and use the resources of other community organizations (2000: 24). The seventh element, Georgakas identifies is the “strategy of winning” (2000: 25). They only engaged in points of struggle where they could be effective and each encounter was seen as a “training exercise” for the next battle (2000: 25). Although all of these elements are important, some of these are more directly related to pedagogy and to tactics and strategy. The largest take-away is that these seven legacy values are still useful in movement building and in confronting the state today and in defending oneself as part of a group from police and state oppression.

CONCLUSION

Even though the LRBW was of relatively limited duration, it has served as a connecting process in the lives of its members. Some of its members have remained active in struggle and in the revolutionary movement to the present day. As they demanded and worked towards change, they found that even when they won the battles, and reforms were enacted, nothing fundamentally changed on the front lines of factory production or in the overall quality of their lives. The study of the LRBW allows us to observe the historical trajectory of a particular group’s identification of social problems and their ability to analyze those problems from a theoretical perspective. Through this process they gained greater practical knowledge in how to address those problems in the quest for their resolution. This study has sought to identify a pedagogy of revolution through their implementation of theory and practice.

The LRBW was under FBI and police surveillance for several years. But due to their organizational (practical development) and political (strategic and tactical development) processes they were able to always provide legal protection to their members and were able to guarantee that not only were their members kept out of the judicial system, but also that needed resources were not unnecessarily redirected to legal battles. As Cockrel, a former member, once noted the courts and the police had failed to jail members of the LRBW because they were grounded in a grassroots organization movement that mobilized to protect its members (Georgakas & Surkin [1975] 1998: 165).

The LRBW was under constant attack from various directions, the UAW, the Detroit Police, the FBI, and IRS were all at various points investigating them. However, through their ability

to understand and link theory and practice and through their development of critical consciousness through a pedagogy of revolution, they were able to use both the organizational and political processes as a means to not only build the LRBW, but to protect themselves from the criminal justice system as well. Their organizational model offers key insights to activists today in how to do the same.

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