

“FAN THE FLAMES:” THE THEORIES AND ACTIVISM OF CHICANA/O COMMUNISTS  
BETWEEN 1968-1990

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

History—Doctor of Philosophy

2019

## ABSTRACT

### “FAN THE FLAMES:” THE THEORIES AND ACTIVISM OF CHICANA/O COMMUNISTS BETWEEN 1968-1990

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This dissertation examines the debates around Chicana/o nationalism, nationhood, and self-determination by using archival documents and oral histories to study the ideologies and actions of the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement (ATM) and the League of Revolutionary Struggle that interpreted the Marxist canon based on their unique experiences as Chicana/os in the U.S to organize against oppression. I explore how these groups used a hybrid of nationalist ideologies with those around class to contribute to both the intellectual tradition of Latina/o activism while diversifying our understanding of activists who utilized the Marxist canon. The activists in these organizations complicate the dominant narratives of identity politics of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s to further enrich the legacy of the Chicana/o movement as one that was ideologically diverse, international, cross-racial, and cross-ethnic. The multi-and cross-racial framework in this research highlights the intersection of race, class, and gender by activists seeking equal citizenship and an end to U.S. capitalism and imperialism. This project is an intellectual, social, and institutional history of Chicana/o communists between the 1960s and 1990.

The every-day lives of communist activists fighting for better citizenship and democratic rights during the global Cold War are at the center of this study. These groups and activists identified as some combination of Marxists, Leninists, Maoists, or Stalinists at a time when political surveillance was rampant and being affiliated with communism was seen as being anti-American. I explore how the organizations responded to this surveillance and how they

continued to operate across various spheres of activism including in the labor sector, on college campuses, and in electoral politics by using a United Front approach.

I show how the groups mobilized among lower stratum workers in the auto industry, cannery factories, and among hotel and restaurant workers because the point of production is where they believed they could be most effective. They also organized students on college campuses by participating in the fights for establishing and protecting Chicana/o and Ethnic studies, as well as affirmative action. These groups such as the League which was the result of the merger between Chicana/o, African American, and Asian American communists were critical because they created linkages between these various spheres of activism that at times were not speaking to one another in order to fight a restricting U.S. capitalist society during the 1970s and 1980s that was switching to neoliberal policies. I argue that this strategy allowed for the organizations to be effective in building support for the struggles they took up in the name of fighting for better democratic, social, and human rights.

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What the government is doing amongst our people is downright evil,  
disturbing but not surprising that's for certain  
With all of the conflict and propaganda I believe they are simply trying to slander  
Start a civil war within the USA amongst black and white and those alike  
They are simply pushing us to our limit so that we can all get together and get with it  
They want us to rebel so that it makes it easier for them to kill us and put us in jail...  
It is for sure time that we as a people stand up for acknowledgement and accomplishment of  
what we call human rights  
It is time to rebel, better yet raise hell

Joey Bada\$\$, "AMERIKKAN IDOL," *ALL-AMERIKKAN BADA\$\$*, (Cinematic Music Group  
and Pro Era Records, 2017).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first and foremost would like to thank all of the workers I have interacted with over the course of my life, dissertation research, and writing the document. Seeing my mother wake up at 1am to work over time at a paper finishing factory and my father's story of working on the Banana *fincas* at the age of 12 in Guatemala as I grew up inspired my passion to focus on the struggles and triumphs of workers. They both immigrated to the United States before the age of 20 and worked either as a domestic maid or a farmworker or day gardener before obtaining legal status. Their labor has allowed for my brothers and I to explore options beyond the ones they did not have. Angel B. and Vilma *Blanca* Estella, *Muchísimas gracias. Los quiero mucho y soy quien soy por todo que han hecho por mi.* I promise I was enrolled in school all of those years you couldn't grasp what it meant to be a PhD student.

To my oldest brother David and sister-in-law Rocio (and the greater Gutierrez clan), as well as my other brother Kaven and your partner Esmeralda, and my nephews Junior and Xavier, and the newest addition to the family my niece Briana Bella. Thank you for cracking the jokes that were always well welcomed and for everything you have done for me from paying for meals, teaching me how to play sports, and raising the future of our family. I wouldn't be anywhere without you guys setting the path for me to follow. You will probably never read the diss but just know it got done.

Various families that are non-blood related made this journey possible. I would like to thank the Ruiz family which treated me as one of their own over the course of the past 10 years. I also want to give a special thanks to the Fernandez clan and Joe for whom which none of the bulk of my research in the Bay Area would have been possible if you hadn't opened your home to me on various occasions. Pupusas on me next time I am in the area. The Hernandez family has

been a constant in my life since I was four years old from the baseball days to Vegas trips to just hanging out at “The Spot.” I always felt like one of the fam even after being away months at a time. Aaron, thank you for being one of the best friends a person could ask for.

To the Rosewood family off of Rosewood block. You guys always treated me like one of the guys even though I was always Bunde and Kdog’s little brother. A large part of who I am today is from the experiences I had growing up on our block in South Gate. A special shout out to the Rosewood and Paisa Fantasy Leagues. Our group pod and smack talking made the cold East Lansing weather bearable and at times I talked to y’all more than I did my own blood family. I consider myself lucky to have been raised in our community and look forward to continuing our life-long Vegas trips.

The University of California Irvine contingent of labor historians and political scientists created a drive in me to explore the lives of workers and their power to transform the structures at be in U.S. society that result in oppression. This began in Dr. Armando Ibarra’s Chicano/Latino studies course and continued in courses with Dr. Rudy Torres and Dr. Alfredo Carlos who all remain valued mentors. Also while at UCI, I had the opportunity to take courses and work with Dr. Gilbert Gonzalez and Dr. Raul Fernandez who helped me realize what it meant to be an engaged labor scholar and graciously wrote letters of recommendation to help me begin this journey. This dissertation is a product of the Chicano/Latino Studies program, the scholars in that community, and the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program for funding two undergraduate papers that became the basis for the dissertation. Also in the UCI family I would like to thank Rob Nothoff and Bivi Nothoff for being amazing people and organizers that kept me grounded every time we had a drink.

At Michigan State I have had the honor of working with individuals who explore the lives of workers of various backgrounds. Dr. Lisa Fine, Dr. Lewis Siegelbaum, Dr. Glen Chambers, Dr. Peter Beattie, Dr. David Wheat, and Dr. LaShawn Harris went above and beyond helping me despite not being on my committee by either providing advice in passing or opening up their homes at various times. I reserve the greatest of gratitude to Dr. Pero Dagbovie who at many points in my academic career provided necessary conversations about things outside of academia like the current state of hip hop along with monetary assistance when it looked like I would not be able to conduct research, or pay the bills, or have insurance to live. Thank you for teaching me what a great mentor looks like even when you were not the chair of the dissertation committee. Dr. Delia Fernandez and Dr. Michael Stamm at various points in my career have helped the dissertation and my academic development to include things outside of just writing the document. My time at Michigan State would not have been the same without the guidance of my co-advisors Dr. Javier Pescador and Dr. Edward Murphy who both read countless papers, had discussions, and provided critical feedback on how to convert my scattered ideas into concrete pages. The emotional and real labor these individuals all exerted onto my academic development will never be forgotten.

To the graduate student community at MSU, thank you. I would have never survived this experience without the intellectual and every-day conversations we had over food, beer, or coffee. Shout out to the long durée drinking crew including: James and Chantal Blackwell, Tara Reyelts, Katie Greene, Joey Bradshaw, Kalonji Walton, and the others that came in and out of the Peanut Barrel on Friday afternoons. I learned so much from the Americanist contingency throughout the years including from Rich Mares, Jake Jurss, Ryan Huey, and Sara Bijani that helped me form my ideas along the way. John and Amanda Milstead, Kathryn Lankford, Heather



Brothers and Mike Lark, and Dave and Lauren Glovsky thank you guys for never saying no to any time I needed help for something or just a drink to chat. Your close friendship and the opening of your homes to me on different occasions will be some of the memories I cherish most from my time in graduate school. I would not have survived this journey and move from Los Angeles to Michigan especially without the nights of great conversation, food, and record listening at the Milstead home. Others have read and commented on different iterations of different chapters and provided supportive feedback such as Liz Timbs, Adrienne Tyrey, Emily Elliot, Carolyn Pratt, and Helen Kaibara. Lastly, Chris Shell and Ramon Miranda Beltran, glad y'all entered the program during my final two years as the comradery you guys provided helped me to step away from the writing process to enjoy myself during the home stretch.

Various grants from different entities allowed for this research to happen. The most important one being the Andrew Mellon Council of Library and Information Resources grant that allowed for me to travel the country exploring at various archives at times for one piece of propaganda from the writings of the organizations written about in this dissertation. Most importantly, they showed me the importance of working with archivists and taking the time to understand the ins and outs of how archives are constructed and operate. Grants from the history department at MSU, the Chicano/Latino Studies program, the Council of Graduate Students, The Center for Latin American Studies, the Organization of American Historians, the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies, the Labor and Working Class History Association, and the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historians Association have allowed me to conduct research or give presentations about the research I did throughout my graduate career. At these conferences my work was sharpened by the critiques and comments by professors including: Clarence Lang, David Barber, Nancy MacLean, Matt Garcia, Mario Garcia, David

Montejano, and countless others in the extended academic community. I was also able to create an intellectual community and friendships, with graduate students across the country that I am grateful for. Rosie Bermudez and Tiffany Gonzalez have been two friends that always sent me positive messages of support over the course of my graduate career along with countless others.

This work would not have been possible without the archivists and activists I engaged with over the past six years. For opening up their homes or for telling me their life histories I want to especially thank the former activists of the ATM and the League including: Theresa Montaña, Peter Shapiro, Joe Navarro, Eric Mann, Bill Gallegos, Ed Gallegos, Cruz Olmeda Becerra, Arturo Diaz, Eva Martinez, and Beto Flores. These interviews would not have been possible without the help of Dr. Mae Ngai and Eddie Wong. I hope this dissertation serves as the first step to telling the story of the organizations you helped to create and sustain in the name of social justice and better human rights. I can't wait to continue exploring these histories and providing a more in depth narrative.

The archivists at the libraries including: the Southern California Library for Social Studies, the San Francisco State University Labor Archives, the University of California Los Angeles Chicano Studies Research Center, the California State University Fullerton Oral History Center, the University of California Berkeley Ethnic Studies Library, the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University, the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas, and special collections repositories at Michigan State University, Washington State University, the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and Stanford University, thank you. The labor of archivists and workers in the libraries continue to sustain and influence the scholarship conducted by scholars. Without their labor such projects such as this one would not be possible.

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## KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

ABDC	Anti-Bakke Decision Coalition
ATM	August 29 <sup>th</sup> Movement
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
BPP	Black Panther Party
BWC	Black Workers Congress
CASA	El Centro de Acción Social Autónomo
CAP	Congress of African People
CL	Communist League
CSULA	California State University Los Angeles
EBLC	East Bay Labor Collective
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GM	General Motors
IWK	I Wor Kuen
LRUP	La Raza Unida Party
The League	League of Revolutionary Struggle
LALUO	Los Angeles Labor Unity Organization
NCM	New Communist movement
MLMT	Marxist Leninist Mao-Tse-Tung Thought
MEChA	El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán
OL	October League
PRRWO	Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization

RG	Red Guard
RCL	Revolutionary Communist League
SP	Socialist Party
STT	Seize the Time
UCSB	University of California Santa Barbara
UDB	Union Del Barrio
UAW	United Auto Workers
UFW	United Farm Workers
UIU	Upholsters International Union of North America

## INTRODUCTION

“You have a life’s trajectory and everything in it builds you ideologically.”

-Theresa Montaña, 2018.

Theresa Montaña upon recollecting her activism during the Chicana/o movement between the 1970s and 1980s contained hard feelings about her labor and theoretical organizing development. Montaña was first a member of the United Mexican American Students (UMAS) organization and later El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA)<sup>1</sup> at the California State University of Los Angeles (CSULA). UMAS and MEChA were two critical student groups in the Chicana/o movement but eventually Montaña saw the “Marxists of color” at the CSULA college campus. She saw the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, a predominantly Chicana/o communist organization that began in 1974, working with other left groups who were mostly “folks of color.” This attracted her to the organization. She made a “conscious decision” upon joining the group that movement building and organizing was going to be her life and not just “something to do” while she was in college. Instead, it would be her life’s work. “Wherever I went it was going to be a personal and political agenda,” she claimed.

Montaña currently serves as the Vice President of the California Teachers Association, a union she was a part of while she was an open-Communist K-12 teacher. She is also a Professor of Chicana/Chicano Studies at California State University, Northridge. She posits, and this dissertation argues as well, that you can not separate the time activists like Montaña spent in groups such as the ATM and another group the League of Revolutionary Struggle from the time they spent in cultural nationalist organizations like UMAS and MEChA as well as their present organizing. She still has many of the beliefs from her time in the ATM and the League and she

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<sup>1</sup> Roughly translated as the “The Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán”

still seeks to build power within the teacher's union during the current attacks on the labor movement. "We have to work to protect the unions," she argued.

Montaño's time in the ATM and the League was a significant part of her life as well as thousands of others. She recalls being on picket lines, selling newspapers, talking and bringing workers to college campuses, as well as participating in the Chicana/o student movement. The ATM and the League connected workers struggles throughout California and other parts of the country and those of students together while organizing their communities. The Chicana/o and Latina/o members of these groups were mostly young, working-class individuals, like Montaño who had been raised in South Central Los Angeles. They took their organizing "seriously" by doing a lot of studying to "see what our position is." Montaño argues that they "actually did believe" that they were building the "revolutionary movement that had the potential to change the power structure in the world, not just the United States."

One major ideological thread that ran through activists in the ATM was that in order to "really change power structures," they would have to "build a multinational movement." They believed that "Chicanos weren't going to do it on their own," an important reason why the primarily Chicana/o group merged with Asian Americans and African Americans to create the League in 1978. Both the ATM and the League subscribed to the ideals of Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism. Chicana/os, according to Montaño, would play a particular role in building a communist movement that would not be exclusive from the movements of other racial groups. She recalls fighting with organizations like MEChA that responded when Chicana/o communists brought up their perspective by saying things such as "you can't bring that Marxist, internationalist shit in this nationalist organization." Being a self-identified Marxist, or communist, was at times hard for Montaño. At several points, her commitment and affinity for



helping communities of color was questioned. “They made it seem like we were outsiders without the recognition that damn it I helped build organizations like MEChA,” she passionately exclaimed. Her site of activism while in the ATM and the League was the Chicana/o movement and she claims she “didn’t overtake anything” which has been the narrative claimed by historians of the Chicana/o movement. “I continued to build MEChA and the Chicano student movement but I did it as a part of the League” to build a revolutionary socialist movement at the same time. Her belief and that of the ATM and the League was that they were helping other organizations to “go beyond to fix the world.”

This dissertation first addresses why people such as Theresa Montañó and members of the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement and League of Revolutionary Struggle have been largely ignored despite a mass boom in Chicano Movement Studies in the twenty-first century as defined by historian Mario García.<sup>2</sup> In the most recent edited volume on Chicana/o movement history, and a significant monograph on the movement by leading scholars Mario García and Juan Gómez-Quiñones and Irene Vasquez, Marxist organizations receive scarce attention. There continues to be a primary focus on the ideologies of cultural nationalism and *chicanismo* despite the existence of multiple ideologies that mobilized activists for social change while changing the political consciousness of workers, students, and community members. *Chicanismo* was the “vehicle used to express Chicano nationalism,” which was the dominant ideology expressed throughout the Chicana/o movement stressing brotherhood, community, and Chicano self-determination.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> There has been a recent boom in scholarship related to the Chicana/o movement by a younger generation of scholars. Significant time has passed and works are being conducted by people who either had no affiliation, or were not born during the movement. For more see: Mario T. García, *The Chicano Movement: Perspectives from the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge Press, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Ernesto Chávez, *Mi Raza Primero: Nationalism Identity and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 7.

This project engages with multiple historiographies such as the work surrounding the Cold War to examine how activists operated during the era while fighting for social change. It also engages with the scholarship in African American, Latin American, and Chicana/o history to show how Chicana/os struggled for equal citizenship rights. They did so by seeking alliances with different racial groups, which also highlights a crucial growing literature that examines the crossing of racial lines or what Jeffrey Ogbar has deemed “rainbow radicalism,” or radical ethnic nationalism.<sup>4</sup> Thus, while I do focus primarily on Chicana/o communists, their work was broad and coalitional there are histories related to other racial groups woven throughout this project.

I seek to answer why these activists joined Marxist oriented groups and how their personal identities changed. I am particularly interested in analyzing how the Marxist canon was utilized and also developed in relation to how the activists utilized the ideologies for their own practical usage. By placing Marxists participating in the Chicana/o movement at the center of this study, I will show these organizations were vital to pushing the radical critiques of the Chicana/o movement as were the groups promoting cultural nationalism and other identity based mobilizations of the conditions facing oppressed people in the United States. The ATM and the League have often been seen as fringe activists that disrupted the Chicana/o movement instead of historical actors that were pushing its political agenda. A leftist radical tradition was existent before the 1960s in organizing labor rights mobilization, fights for equal citizenship, and a changing of political consciousness based on Marxist ideologies. Chicana/o Marxist groups of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s pushed questions around labor, class, race, ethnicity, and at times

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<sup>4</sup> Ogbar argues that the Black Power movement in the United States had a clear influence on the radical activists of various social movements including those among Latina/os, Asians, and Native Americans. Jeffrey Ogbonna Green Ogbar *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 159.

gender to have an intersectional approach that informed the radicalism of the Chicana/o movement.

Major organizations in the Chicana/o and New Communist movement's had to grapple with the ideas and platforms of the ATM and the League which forced people to reckon with their positions in regards to labor, students, and the oppression faced by Chicana/o and Latina/o communities. The ATM and the League connected the struggles of Latina/os with those of Asian Americans and African Americans in order to reconsider the changes occurring in capitalism and imperialism during the 1970s and 1980s. This introduction provides a sketch of the various historiographies the dissertation contributes to including California history, the Latina/o radical tradition, the Chicana/o movement, Latina/os and labor unionism, as well as a discussion of sources, terms, and chapter outlines.

### **1970s and 1980s Political and Economic Changes in California**

This dissertation primarily focuses on the activism of the ATM and the League in California mostly in places like Los Angeles and San Francisco despite the groups also being active in other states like New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, New York, and parts of the Midwest and the South. The activists in the groups were not detached from political and economic changes that occurred between 1968 and 1990.

The city of Los Angeles was becoming the “second largest metropolitan area in the United States” during the 1970s and 1980s according to critical geographer Laura Pulido. California more broadly was also changing. Latina/os constituted the largest minority group in Los Angeles with African Americans being the second largest. Pulido's data shows that over 80 percent were of Mexican origin with the majority being native born.<sup>5</sup> These demographic shifts

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<sup>5</sup> Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 41.

and changes in racial hierarchy were accompanied by economic shifts in the global economy and California's economy. Pulido explains that at the time other regions of the United States were experiencing the pains of deindustrialization, manufacturing continued to be integral to Los Angeles's economy. This, however, would change in the 1980s.

In 1970 about 26% of all jobs in Los Angeles were in manufacturing, of which almost 21% of jobs in the industry were Latina/os. ATM and League activists sought to organize in these industrial points of production like the auto industry in the 1970s and by the 1980s they were attempting to keep manufacturing jobs and plants in the state of California and in the United States more generally. "Manufacturing has traditionally served as an economic ladder for immigrants and the poor," according to Pulido.<sup>6</sup> This industry provided opportunities for laborers who perhaps were undocumented or were from the poor or working class as were many of the members of the ATM. These changes in industry informed the platforms of the ATM and the League who sought to go into the point of production to organize the workers that organized labor dismissed as un-organizable.

California continued to be a receiving location for large waves of immigrants coming not only from Mexico but also other Latin American nations such as Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua.<sup>7</sup> Juan Gonzalez stresses that the migration of labor to the United States shown in foreign policies such as the Bracero Program brought Mexican laborers from 1942-1965 to relieve the labor shortage created by World War II. This program is only one example of how Latin American laborers were brought to the U.S. to be exploited for low wages in harsh working

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<sup>6</sup> Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 46.

<sup>7</sup> For more on how the Chicana/o movement and Mexican American social movements responded to immigration issues during the twentieth century see: David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Jimmy Patiño, *Raza Sí, Migra No: Chicano Movement Struggles for Immigrant Rights in San Diego* (Durham: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

conditions. Gonzalez and countless others have picked up on claims of the U.S. being an empire to stress how neoliberalism and the rise of maquiladoras magnified late 20<sup>th</sup> century (im)migration. The process of immigration has existed since prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but Gonzalez expresses the constant waves of migration are attached to U.S. imperialist actions whether through economic trade policies or the support of military dictatorships that utilized violence.<sup>8</sup>

This gave rise to demographic changes as Pulido shows that helped Latina/os became the majority minority. The process of immigrants arriving to California was not met with welcoming arms. California actually played a central role in the rising nativist movements that swept the country in the late 1970s and 1980s. California was the principle receiving nation for illegal/undocumented immigrants and one scholar argues it was a microcosm of where the nation was going in terms of dealing with the “myriad changes affecting, and being affected by, immigration.” Periodic conflicts existed in some parts of the state between groups of natives and newcomers. They fought over things like housing, education and jobs and those who were undocumented were seen as a potential burden by some. California before 1980 was perceived as a place that was “harboring nativist attitudes toward foreigners” and was consistently negative.<sup>9</sup> This created an atmosphere in areas such as labor that did not actively seek to organize immigrants.

Pulido shows the importance of working-class politics to Chicana/o leftists and other Latina/os who were no longer confined to the “secondary labor market and agriculture” and they became “more fully integrated into the industrial working class” after WWII.<sup>10</sup> These

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<sup>8</sup> Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Elliott R. Barkan, “Return of the Nativists? California Public Opinion and Immigration in the 1980s and 1990s” *Social Science History* 27, No. 2, (Summer 2003): 229-283, 238.

<sup>10</sup> Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 46.

experiences in low wage-work led activists to organize around issues including labor, immigration, and worker's rights.. Armando Ibarra, Alfredo Carlos, and Rodolfo Torres correctly posit that many of the social movements involving Latino and Latina agency are based on issues directly affecting poor or working-class people. Many of the best-known of these movements were "intricately linked to material conditions and class struggle." Latina/os in the United States emerged in the processes of socioeconomic and spatial transformation during times of increasing social polarization and class inequalities with wide and deep divisions.<sup>11</sup> Behind a "huge, shimmering urban economy" in cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco that this dissertation focuses on, scholars have discovered a "hidden economic trap that limits the genuine progress of poor, working class, and the fragile first generation of" middle class Mexicans.<sup>12</sup>

Economic changes happening at the national and global scales also influenced the local experiences of who activists from the ATM and the League tried to organize and informed their approaches to their activism. Economic structures, systems, and social relations are after all, "about people."<sup>13</sup> The new epoch of world capitalism created processes of globalization that not only transformed economic policies and created fundamental shifts in the capitalist system but they also reconfigured social and political dynamics. In the 1970s a new crisis led to a "new mode of global capital accumulation now known as neoliberalism," which resulted in an economic restructuring across the world but more particular to Latin America through the transnational process.<sup>14</sup> According to William Robinson this transnational activity, "profoundly reorganized political relations and hierarchies beyond individual nation-states" and promoted the

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<sup>11</sup> Armando Ibarra and Alfredo Carlos and Rodolfo Torres, *The Latino Question: Politics, Labouring Classes and the Next Left* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 179.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Introduction in *Labor Versus Empire: Race, Gender, and Migration*, edited by Gilbert Gonzalez, Raul Fernandez, Vivian Price, David Smith, and Linda Trinh Vo (New York: Routledge, 2004), xxi.

transfers of capital and products within one consolidated world arena.<sup>15</sup> Neoliberalism and globalization brought about a dramatic sharpening of “social inequalities, increased polarization, and the persistence of widespread poverty” in places like Latin America and the United States and reflected the broader pattern of global social polarization.<sup>16</sup>

Neoliberalism removed “crucial political levers” exercised by workers and unions in the decades prior to the 1970s. The years between 1978-1980 according to David Harvey can be looked at as a “revolutionary turning point” in the world’s social and economy history.<sup>17</sup> It resulted in the loss of jobs as the export of production to low-wage countries overseas impacted the wages and working conditions in the United States. The regimes of Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margret Thatcher in England put neoliberalism on the center stage of global capitalism. Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of “political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills with an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.”<sup>18</sup> Components of the process of neoliberalization include deregulation, privatization, and the withdrawal of the state from areas of social provision. It further created the divisions of labor, social relations, ways of life and thought, as well as attachments to land and habits of heart according to David Harvey and revealed in the lived experiences of ATM and League activists.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Introduction in *Labor Versus Empire*, xxi.

<sup>16</sup> William I. Robinson, “Latin America and the Empire of Global Capital” in *Labor Versus Empire: Race, Gender, and Migration*, edited by Gilbert Gonzalez, Raul Fernandez, Vivian Price, David Smith, and Linda Trinh Vo (New York: Routledge, 2004), 46.

<sup>17</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

Southern California began undergoing the larger process of deindustrialization as national shifts began from a Fordist to a post-Fordist economy.<sup>20</sup> African Americans, and Latina/os like those in the ATM and the League, fought to keep these industries from closing down and running away to other parts of the world. During the mid-1980s the state's manufacturing jobs declined while service industry jobs increased. This also correlated to a drop in wages. This exportation of jobs to outside of the country heavily impacted the terrain the ATM and the League operated within.

The ATM and the League also had to deal with a shifting political landscape in the state of California. The election of Ronald Reagan as governor of California, a position he would serve in from 1967 until 1975, created an environment that sought to stamp out radical activism that was occurring on college campuses and in labor. His terms as governor gave rise to his presidential terms which lasted from 1981 until 1989.<sup>21</sup> This means that Reagan was in positions of power during the time Chicana/o communists in the ATM and the League were organizing. Reagan ran his campaigns for both governor and president based on bringing back order in California and the country during a time when campus activism was occurring at places like the University of California Berkeley.

Reagan and politicians on the right used the public alienation of student protestors such as Berkeley's Free Speech Movement for their own political gain. He was able to manipulate the reactions of both university communities and the general public while he was governor of California in a manner that became beneficial to his career and led to a run for the presidency. He sought out "radical" or "communist" professors who he believed were indoctrinating

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<sup>20</sup> Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 48.

<sup>21</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008).



students. This included working with Federal Bureau of Investigation agents to get information on students and professors.<sup>22</sup>

Reagan not only implemented neoliberal policies in what were deemed “Reaganomics” but he also helped to create a shift in the democracy of the United States referred to as the New Right. Robert Self examines how different perceptions of the family has impacted politics since the 1960s.<sup>23</sup> The narrow vision of democratic rights and citizenship defended by conservatives in the 1970s in time became the basis of conservative orthodoxy and, by the 1990s, of the nation’s political center.”<sup>24</sup> Self explores how in the mid-1960s American social movements asserted it was the governments responsibility to “ensure equality not just for racial minorities but also for women and sexual minorities. Though hardly united, those movements sought an expansion of the nation’s definition of full citizenship, ad ultimately of its social contract.”<sup>25</sup> Self highlights how social movements of both the political right and the left utilized family, gender, and sexuality to tug the support of the state in their favor. State authorities and institutions were tugged in two directions due to battles over gender and sexuality that invoked the state’s role for advancing liberty and equality.

Specifically, the mobilization of the New Right and Reagan challenged liberal movements by arguing a protection of the family was required.<sup>26</sup> They believed the nuclear family was in crisis in response to the political activism of the Women’s liberation front and the

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<sup>22</sup> Gerard J. De Groot, “Ronald Reagan and Student Unrest in California, 1966-1970” *Pacific Historical Review* 65, No. 1 (February, 1996): 107-129.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*. 1.

<sup>26</sup> For more on the rise of the New Right in places such as California see: Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: Norton, 2011); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

gay liberation movement. Self observes the long term constriction of the modern right in responding to the various social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Liberalism was seen as a moral threat by the New Right. Disputes occurred over gender, sexuality, the national polity, and how Americans conceived of the nation. Led by Reagan this movement stood opposed to the ideals and platforms put forward by the ATM and the League that this dissertation examines.

It is against this backdrop that the ATM and the League created their organizations and attempted to organize students and workers as is shown throughout this dissertation. They were among the first to recognize the need to mobilize against political figures like Reagan as well as global capitalist changes in what we now know as neoliberalism that saw the runaway of factories in which ATM and League activists were employed and were organizing. It is for these reasons that it is critical to examine both the ideological approaches of the organizations and their mobilizations in various avenues of activism including labor and student struggles.

### **The Latina/o Radical Tradition**

The movement(s) discussed throughout this era were led by men and women who were both intellectuals and activists that not only imagined a different future but they also had an emancipatory vision similar to the one Robin D.G. Kelley lays out in regards to black intellectuals. They sought to create a vision of the world that was more radical and inclusive than what others proposed. They challenged and reshaped not only cultural and revolutionary nationalism but also communism in which they produced “brilliant theoretical insights.” Collective social movements according to Kelley are incubators of new knowledge. Activism and intellectual work is something he believes, and I argue throughout this dissertation, were heavily compatible and resulted in these social movements generating “new knowledge, new

theories, new questions.”<sup>27</sup> These activists confronted systems of oppression and imagined a new society. This “dreaming” done by these individuals reveals a reflection among activists that different “cognitive maps of the future” and of the world were being born in the 1970s and 1980s and continue to be imagined.

Alan Eladio Gómez similarly picks up on Kelley’s notion of a radical imagination but specifically relates it to what he calls the Chicana/o Left. His monograph focuses on how activists created a “nuanced and politically astute forms of international solidarity.”<sup>28</sup> Participants in his work, like in this dissertation, of the Chicana/o movement saw themselves as part of a “larger hemispheric and global political community.” This political perspective led them to look outside the borders of the United States to create connections with those around the world that were also anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist. I utilize Gómez’s definition of the Chicana/o Left which he specifically uses to mean “people, organizations, imaginaries, and projects that advanced a critique of capitalism and (U.S.) imperialism, while focusing their political activity on local struggles concerning labor rights, community power, human rights, socialism, and international solidarity.”<sup>29</sup> Similar to him I emphasize that the Chicana/o left, or Chicana/o communists, emerged from and within the Chicana/o movement, but also had deeper roots in twentieth-century leftist politics.<sup>30</sup> The Chicana/o left emerged from the Chicana/o movements’ cultural nationalism, the radical history of Mexican labor organizing, and the localized politics of community control. Mexican descendant communities maintained a long history of creating self-help organizations to provide legal and social support to one another

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<sup>27</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 7-8.

<sup>28</sup> Alan Eladio Gómez, *The Revolutionary Imaginations of Greater Mexico: Chicana/o Radicalism Solidarity Politics and Latin American Social Movements* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 26-27.

<sup>30</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley has a similar argument in regards to African American communists in Alabama that he argues came from the same soil as nationalist oriented activists. Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

which created stronger community ties. The organizations like the ATM and the League formed a part of the U.S. Third World Left as Gómez shows and I argue deserves to be placed in the broader historiography of U.S. communism.

According to Robin D.G. Kelley, Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* shifted the center of radical thought and revolution from Europe to the "so-called 'periphery- to the colonial territories, marginalized colored people of the metropolitan centers of capital'" which is one main goal of this project.<sup>31</sup> While Robinson focuses on the black diaspora, many of his claims also apply to the Latina/o communist experience. The book makes a case, as argued by Kelley, that the "radical thought and practice which emerged in these sites of colonial and racial capitalist exploitation" were produced by "cultural logics and epistemologies of the oppressed as well as the specific racial and cultural forms of domination."<sup>32</sup> Robinson decenters Marxist history and historiography in the context of African Americans in which I follow in this tradition to further diversify our understanding of contributors to not only Marxist movements but also Marxist literature. People such as Theresa Montaña were not only activists but they were theoretical producers, amateur historians, and organic intellectuals in every sense of each word.

Latina/o communists, much like the black radicals that Robinson focuses on, did not create the theories they worked with. Instead, through their work and study in mass movements did they apply them to their daily lives. The activists explored in this dissertation were an "accretion, over generations, of collective intelligence gathered from struggle."<sup>33</sup> They were and are a part of a Latina/o radical tradition that emerged from theories of nationalism, collectivism,

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<sup>31</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, Forward to Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of California Press, 2000), xii.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, xii.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, xxx.

and Marxism found throughout the twentieth century in sending Latin American nations and the generations of Latina/os since. In particular, Marxism, and Marxist-Leninist socialism, examined capitalist expropriation, imperialism, and the exploitation of labor found in the ideologies of Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx, and Vladimir Lenin. The canon of Marxism has provided the “ideological, historical, and political vocabulary for much of the radical and revolutionary presence emergent in western societies.”<sup>34</sup> While Marxism is a western construction that did focus predominantly on European nations and historical development and experiences, African Americans, Latina/os, and Latin Americans gravitated toward its ideas to understand their own experiences with racism, exploitation, and domination under a capitalist system.

For anti-colonial thinkers such as Aimé Césaire, Marxism and communism should serve black people, not the other way around. As Robinson writes in summing up this element of Césaire’s thought, “philosophies and movements must serve the people, not the people the doctrine and the movement.”<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the activists examined in these pages adopted Marxism-Leninism and communism for the purpose of serving the people. In many ways, activists of the 1970s and 1980s took their examples from Mao Tse-Tung who argued communists needed to organize within their communities. As Robeson Taj Frazier has noted, black radicals looked at communist China and Asian revolutionary movements in the struggles against imperialism and social and economic justice. The ATM and the League were self-identified as Marxist-Leninist-Maoists and also looked towards China for inspiration and guidance much like some African American’s including W.E.B. Du Bois and Robert F. Williams. Frazier stresses that the Cold War period from 1945-1991, speaks to the immense productions of “force, violence, ideology, and discourse through which consensus and ideas

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<sup>34</sup> Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

about modernity, national security, citizenship, and world relations were manufactured, circulated, reshaped, and rejected in different national, social, and geographical contexts.”<sup>36</sup>

Western imperialism and the expansion of global capitalism led to activists challenging racism, social injustice, and economic exploitation.

### ***El Movimiento***

The Chicana/o movement of the sixties and seventies was a period of high political consciousness. Traditionally scholars have stayed within a 1965-1975 framework but this dissertation pushes a further end date for the purpose of showing what activists did when the movement declined. Juan Gómez-Quiñones and Irene Vazquez argue *el movimiento* was a “broad series of interrelated multi-organizational and multi-field activities and movements that sought to secure basic equities for Mexican Americans in various aspects of life.”<sup>37</sup> The Chicana/o movement as defined by Gómez-Quiñones and Vazquez was a social movement that emerged in the 1960s to “protest the circumstances in which the Mexican American community found itself.” Activists were concerned with a diverse range of agendas including the “fear of cultural disintegration, the lack of economic and social mobility, rampant discrimination, and inadequate educational institutions...Chicanos fought racism and neglect in education and housing and in the realm of culture and identity.”<sup>38</sup> At first a largely student led movement, Mexican American communities began to analyze their position within United States society. They also began to realize that they must empower themselves via their culture and identity to

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<sup>36</sup> Robeson Taj Frazier, *The East Is Black: Cold War China in the Black Radical Imagination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 5.

<sup>37</sup> Juan Gómez-Quiñones and Irene Vasquez, *Making Aztlán: Ideology and Culture of the Chicana and Chicano Movement, 1966-1977* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014), xxv.

<sup>38</sup> Ignacio M. García, *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos Among Mexican Americans* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 4.

politically mobilize for better resources and equal access to institutions including higher education and local political positions of power.

Scholars of the Chicana/o movement and Chicana/o history have paid minimal attention to activists of the left, which is problematic since it hides the ways these organizations shaped Mexican American and Chicana/o political identities. Elizabeth “Betita” Martinez has argued the ATM and other leftist organizations were destructive and undermined labor struggles in New Mexico.<sup>39</sup> Gómez-Quiñones and Vasquez posit that the ATM was influential for raising the political consciousness of students and activists, but they also argue the organization was intrusive and counter productive.<sup>40</sup> They believe the organizations of the left were important because they were transitional for activists of the Chicana/o movement to enter the activism of the 1980s surrounding immigration issues. Carlos Muñoz Jr. claims the ATM was the first distinct Marxist-Leninist group separate from the white New Left, yet they still only receive a superficial treatment despite being present at major historical moments of the movement.<sup>41</sup>

The Chicana/o movement was a broad social movement of interrelated organizations and activists that had a diverse range of agendas.<sup>42</sup> Cultural nationalism was the dominant ideology during the Chicana/o movement that was a “positive force for developing nations and racialized minorities in the West. Its ideological power served to bring diverse groups together under the banner of independence from colonial exploitation, economic underdevelopment, and institutional development.”<sup>43</sup> The ideology of cultural nationalism gained favor across various

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<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Martinez, “A View from New Mexico: Recollections of the Movimiento Left.” *Monthly Review* 54, no. 3 (July, 2002).

<sup>40</sup> Gómez-Quiñones and Vasquez, *Making Aztlán*, 226.

<sup>41</sup> Carlos Jr. Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (New York: Verso Press, 1989), 212.

<sup>42</sup> For more on the Chicano Movement see: Gómez-Quiñones and Vasquez, *Making Aztlán: Ideology and Culture of the Chicana and Chicano Movement, 1966-1977*; Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement*.

<sup>43</sup> George Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun: Lessons from the Chicano Movement, 1965-1975* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 9.

social movements, which created pride within the Chicana/o community to fight systematic oppression.<sup>44</sup> Juan Gómez-Quiñones argues the Chicana/o movement stagnated from 1971-1974 because Marxists created factionalism and fragmentation. He states they had a lack of ideological clarity and consistency that deterred movement activists away from the concept of *chicanismo* so vital from 1966-1977.<sup>45</sup> The Chicana/o Left, however, shows that the movement was always fractured since its genesis, but they were being blamed since they were supposedly based on a foreign ideology that was not created by Chicanos. Instead, I argue that when we center the Chicana/o Left when examining *el movimiento*, it becomes a story that is international, transnational, cross-racial, and cross-ethnic instead of just cultural nationalist which always maintained dominance in the movement.

Scholar George Mariscal refers to nationalism during the Chicana/o movement as being narrow for the purpose of organizing only the Mexican American community. However, he believes some organizations, although extremely rare, challenged narrow nationalists that show the “simultaneous enactment of seemingly opposed ideologies marked movement practices throughout the period, suggesting that single organizations contained not homogenous but diverse agendas.”<sup>46</sup> It is the separatist organizations that followed a Marxist style of organizing that further stress the diversity of the movement, but also the fluidity of political identity of the period. Cultural nationalist organizations faced splits internally and ideologically that often resulted in pitting Marxists versus nationalists. The role of communists in the movement shows that some activists took race into consideration, but also that some de-centered it for the purposes of creating a class struggle while acknowledging the importance of cultural nationalism for

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<sup>44</sup> For how it impacted African Americans see: William Van De Burg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1963-1975* (University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>45</sup> Juan Gómez-Quiñones, “Mexican Students Por La Raza: The Chicano Student Movement in Southern California, 1967-1977” (Santa Bárbara, California: Editorial La Causa, 1978).

<sup>46</sup> Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun*, 44.



political mobilization purposes. Debates occurred between cultural nationalists and leftists around identity, politics, and the Chicano national question that dealt with the concept of internal colonialism.<sup>47</sup>

The Chicana/o movement was not a monolithic entity that followed one ideology or had one goal; rather the diversity of activists, organizations, and agendas shows the fluidity of identity based on region and experience. Mariscal argues that the movement should be seen as a “process that underwent substantial changes at both the organizational and individual levels as local, national, and international contexts shifted. In this regard, the Chicano experience was not unlike that of other social movements.”<sup>48</sup> The Chicana/o movement was a fractured yet interconnected movement that involved events occurring around the globe before and during the Cold War. It was highly informed by social movements occurring in the Global South. Activists crossed borders to work with social movements in Cuba, Mexico, and Puerto Rico. The ideologies of groups like the ATM were constantly reshaped based on global, national, and local events.

The global Cold War was raging on that resulted in a politically polarized world, and in particular regions in the United States and Latin America in which Latina/o communists were involved. Activists throughout Latin America and those in this dissertation sought to implement socialism which produced a “powerful threat to the power and privileges of the incumbent order.”<sup>49</sup> Working-class participation in politics and social movements called for changes to social citizenship which posed a serious threat to those in power. Activists during the Cold War

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<sup>47</sup> Scholars such as Yolanda Alaniz and others have analyzed the positions of activists in regards to the Chicano national question that picked up on Joseph Stalin’s five characteristics of nationhood to determine if Chicana/os had a claim to self-determination. See: Yolanda Alaniz and Megan Cornish, *Viva La Raza: A History of Chicano Identity and Resistance* (Seattle: Red Letter Press, 2008), 47-64.

<sup>48</sup> Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun*, 32.

<sup>49</sup> Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 6.

sought to restructure the economy and forced a “transformation of power relations” which broadened participation in politics, culture and society. Greg Grandin argues that the Cold War was a struggle over mass utopias, or the “ideological visions of how to organize society and its accoutrements” that gave the struggle of activists its transcendental force. This dissertation picks up on his argument that this transcendental force was the “politicization and internationalization of everyday life and familiar encounters.”<sup>50</sup> The Cold War transformed and highlighted the formative power of politics to shape human expectations that Grandin argues needs to be a central element to any definition of the Cold War. It was a period when a larger conflict between the different views of the shape that social citizenship should take raged on.

Leftists broadly show that the social movements of the twentieth century had a multitude of complex ideologies occurring at multiple points throughout their duration. These activists like those in the ATM and the League sought alliances with different racial groups, and also created communication with activists in Mexico that stresses a need for a cross-racial and inter-ethnic framework that explores the cooperation and conflicts seen among communists who believed class was the most important organizing factor.

Laura Pulido phrases inter-ethnic coalitions as creating what she calls the Third World Left, which is not rooted in one particular racial/ethnic group. She states, “a multiethnic approach enables us to see the interaction among various racial/ethnic groups and their influences on each other.” She continues, “the fact that the Third World Left was not just a loose collection of revolutionary activists and Marxist-Leninists but a network of organizations that drew on each other’s ideas” led her to use a comparative approach.<sup>51</sup> In this dissertation I focus on primarily Chicana and Chicano groups but look at how they created relationships and

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<sup>50</sup> Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War*, 17.

<sup>51</sup> Pulido, *Black Brown Yellow & Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*, 3.

coalitions with other racial groups. Pulido and others denote the importance of the network of organizations that did not mobilize in separate vacuums. The identities of Mexican Americans, Chicana/os, Asian Americans, and African Americans changed in relationship to one another.

Scholars have stressed that many activists during the Chicana/o movement believed Marxism was a “White European ideology” and foreign to Mexican American communities. Carlos Muñoz Jr. argues that the reason leftist organizations were not able to earn the hearts and minds of communities and workers was because of the rhetoric used by the groups. Working among a large immigrant population also highlights a hesitancy to acknowledge communist groups in a Cold War era that stomped out anything that resembled communism. Key Chicana/o movement leaders were also anti-communists who believed the ideology posed a danger to the community as it would bring the attention of government policing agencies. Also, the fact that many in the Mexican American community perhaps had lower levels of education highlights the difficulty for understanding complex polemics that deal with larger theoretical and abstract concepts. Scholars have also stated the immigrant status of workers can be seen as an obstacle facing Marxist-Leninists. These hurdles informed the activism of organizations and kept the bulk of Chicana/o activists in the cultural nationalist camp. The difficulties faced by communist organizations such as the ATM existed long before the Chicana/o movement, but scholars have not analyzed the continuities and discontinuities in the strategies utilized by communists of Mexican descent.

In *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che*, Max Elbaum argues organizations that followed a Marxist leftist orientation from the 1970s to the 1990s comprise what he calls the New Communist movement.<sup>52</sup> He analyzes many organizations that

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<sup>52</sup> Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London: Verso, 2002).

searched for a Third-World Marxist style of organizing, and other specific offshoots of Marxism including Stalinism, Maoism, and Trotskyism. He states that Third World Marxism pointed a “way toward building a multiracial movement out of a badly segregated U.S. left”.<sup>53</sup> The radicalization of the 1960s created a search for ideology among activists. Some of these activists looked to previous generations of radicalism while others took inspiration from social movements occurring during the time. Third-World Marxism eventually became the driving force amongst many who participated in the New Left. Organizations saw factions created over ideology, meaning there could be Marxists and nationalists within any one organization. Yet individuals and local histories are absent in Elbaum’s text, requiring historians to research the many organizations he discusses, which this dissertation does by focusing on ATM and the League. The influence of Marxism on organizations highlights the need to challenge the compartmentalized categories of the New Left and the New Communist movement to analyze the fluidity between activists and their organizations because the lines were often blurred amongst people debating ideology. Activists within the New Communist movement relied heavily on the activism and activities of the Old Left, such as labor organizing, which further obscures the categories created by activists of the 1960s and the frameworks casted by scholars.

### **Latina/o Leftists and Labor Unionism**

The ATM and the League were heavily active in labor struggles from 1974-1990 which places them in a broader tradition of Latina/o activists combining labor and civil rights movements throughout the twentieth century. Early Mexican American and Spanish speaking members of the Communist Party USA initiated a labor and civil rights movement which was the precursor of the early civil rights movement, which Zaragosa Vargas argues also formed the

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<sup>53</sup> Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, 3.

foundation of the modern Chicana/o movement.<sup>54</sup> Enrique Buelna asserts a similar argument in his recently published monograph in which he posits a generational argument where CPUSA members like Ralph Cuaron worked with younger activists of the Chicana/o movement indicating a legacy and tradition being passed on from those Vargas writes about to those found on the pages of this dissertation. The story of Chicana/o communists, Buelna argues, is a “quintessential American one and is absolutely relevant to our understanding of who we are as a nation.”<sup>55</sup> This dissertation pushes the tradition past the 1950s that Vargas writes until the end of the 1960s that Buelna periodizes, to show that Latina/o and Chicana/o communists were also organizing and writing in the 1970s and 1980s.

The Mexican American Left and later the Chicana/o and Latina/o Left played a critical role in organizing in the labor sector and on college campuses. Mexican American labor radicalism throughout the twentieth century maintained complicated ties to community-related unionism.<sup>56</sup> Men and women such as Emma Tenayuca and members of El Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Española brought their radical traditions to the CPUSA to include new forms of collaborative action. The activists of the ATM and the League actually argued that they could not join the CPUSA which by the 1970s had taken a route they could not support which is why they began their own vanguard parties but this did not change their labor approach that is a legacy of Mexican Americans in the CPUSA. The Mexican working class has a “long and deeply rooted history in the United States, one that is intimately interwoven into the experience of the labor movement as a whole, and one in which Mexican workers have played a pivotal or leading role at its critical junctures” as posed by Justin Akers Chacón. The history of Mexican labor

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<sup>54</sup> Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> Enrique M. Buelna, *Chicano Communists and the Struggle for Social Justice* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2019), 10.

<sup>56</sup> Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, 9.

radicalism in the United States, and I would extend this to Chicana/os and Latina/os, is the story of a people who have been at the “forefront of grassroots labor unionism in this country.”<sup>57</sup>

Labor scholars have begun to reexamine labor union activism in the 1970s which this dissertation picks up on. Nancy MacLean argues that those excluded from the economic mainstream had lesser citizenship rights. Her focus on Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act stresses how a “culture of exclusion” began breaking down after 1955 in large part due to the grassroots struggles for inclusion in workplaces and from communities and organizations. These activists “revitalized the labor movement” and unions grew under new conditions and attracted large numbers of workers of color and white women.<sup>58</sup>

The 1970s were a moment of further deindustrialization and the beginning of the implementation of neoliberal policies which created a runaway of factories, and with them good paying unionized industrial jobs, to other parts of the world seeking a cheaper and more flexible labor pool. While the 1970s did see a weakening of labor unions and the power of labor as discussed by Jefferson Cowie, other scholars like Lane Windham have begun to show that union participation was actually on the rise when the focus is on women and workers of color during the 1970s. Cowie writes that the 1970s were a moment of anxiety and political confusion among workers who were losing their jobs due to neoliberalism and deindustrialization.<sup>59</sup> Discontent arose among workers who demanded changes in the quality of work life and who conducted wildcat strikes and organized to overthrow “stale bureaucratic union leadership.”<sup>60</sup> Members of the ATM and the League participated in these exact things that Cowie highlights including

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<sup>57</sup> Justin Akers Chacón, *Radicals in the Barrio: Magonistas, Socialists Wobblies, and Communists in the Mexican-American Working Class* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018), 1.

<sup>58</sup> Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>59</sup> Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010)

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

fighting the moving of plants to other parts of the world. The mid-1970s marked the end of the postwar boom which created a stagnation in earnings starting in 1973 and 1974. “Layoffs, plant closures, and union decertification drives” replaced the mid-decade strikes, rank and file movements, and vibrant organizing drives that had once promised a “new day for workers.”<sup>61</sup>

Despite Cowie’s depiction of the 1970s being the working class’ “swan song” that failed to create a lasting national presence and the failures of the mainstream labor movement, Lane Windham argues the 1970s were a vibrant time for labor unions. She poses that the 1970s were actually the first days of a “reshaped and newly energized American working class” which I agree applies to the experiences and mobilizations of the activists of the ATM and the League in labor unions.<sup>62</sup> Women and people of color had long been members of the working class, but what was new in the 1970s was their entrance into well-paying and secured jobs. Upon getting such coveted jobs they pushed for unionization. Many scholars as she points out, especially the work of Cowie, depict an image of the 1970s of working-class backlash and defeat, which is partially correct as losses were definitely more in the history of the ATM and the League than were victories. However, the story changes if we broaden the gaze of labor history as Windham does beyond white, blue-collar men who already had unions in the 1970s to include the millions who were outsiders of labor’s ranks.

I stress the legacy and participation of Mexicans, Mexican Americans, Chicana/os, and Latina/os in labor struggles because the ATM and the League approached their labor organizing informed by Marxist-Leninist theories and applied them to their organizing of what they called lower stratum workers. They attempted to establish influence in the manufacturing sector as will be shown in their work in the auto industry, but they also organized in jobs such as retail and

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<sup>61</sup> Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive*, 12.

<sup>62</sup> Lane Windham, *Knocking on Labor’s Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 3.

service, as well as among cannery workers. This paints a more diversified picture of labor union activism during the 1970s and 1980s. They complicate the common narrative for labor's decline that Windham argues for to show that men and women of color and white women continued combining labor and civil rights law to win economic power. These members of the "reformulated working class" did more than unionize and expanded upon other types of activism.<sup>63</sup>

The ATM and the League organized to fight the changes in global capitalism that played out in their communities but they had to face both employers and labor union bureaucrats to win over workers to communism. Global competition in the 1970s did result in employers squeezing unionized workers and resisted new unionizing by doing things such as breaking labor law or by firing and threatening union supporters. Upon having to compete in a changing global economy they also contracted out labor and ultimately offshored many jobs. Labor organizers and activists encountered structural barriers when they pushed for their right to exercise their full economic citizenship rights. Since unions were indeed being weakened by a new capitalistic structure in the 1970s they faced these fundamental shifts on a much weaker footing.<sup>64</sup> In regards to the 1980s, the years from 1982-1985 marked a dark period for the American labor movement when organizing efforts were finally weakened. A recession in 1981 and 1982 brought unemployment rates of 10% which were the highest since the Great Depression. As Windham notes, union organizing never recovered<sup>65</sup>

However, with unions declining in the 1980s, activists in the ATM and the League did not stop organizing in their factories, hotels, or farms, but instead they are people who operated outside of the traditional definition of the labor movement. Activists with middle-class or more

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<sup>63</sup> Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door*, 7.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 180-187.



privileged backgrounds left their jobs to work among the lower stratum workers to fight not only for economic justice, but also social and political justice.

### **Methodology, Structure, and Terms**

Primary sources including oral histories and organizational ephemera from various social movement organizations of the 1960s-1990 are the basis for this dissertation. I utilize the print culture of organizations like ATM and the League including newspapers and theoretical journals to explore the ideological development of the members of these organizations. Despite at times not having the names of authors on documents due to fear of government surveillance I show how the organization used their ephemera to build support for the struggles they were active in. The written record left behind by these organizations in their newspapers and journals give insight into their tasks and goals for building a socialist revolution in the United States.

Internal documents related to the organizations discussed in this dissertation are also used to view how they operated during the Cold War. In tandem with over 200 Federal Bureau of Investigation records from their Counter Intelligence Program investigation of the ATM I construct aspects of the organizations not found within their writings that they made public. The internal documents from groups like the ATM and the League show how they operated behind closed doors and prepared both ideologically and organizing wise for their struggles they were a part of publicly. FBI documents serve as a key for understanding how the government viewed what these organizations were saying and doing but do contain the bias, like all sources, of being written by agents whose task it was to neutralize organizations like the ATM.

Each chapter also relies on over ten oral histories with either former members of the ATM or the League to attempt to fill in some of the gaps not revealed in the archival sources. These interviews like archival sources contain bias but indicate the political and ideological

developments of the activists at the heart of this dissertation. Their lived experiences operating as Marxist-Leninist-Maoists, communists, socialists, or any other label that was seen as subversive during the Cold War stress that they lived the Cold War daily. The relationships created in the ATM and the League as well as their rivalries with organizations like El Centro de Acción Social Autónomo (CASA) reveal a wider web of influence the activists had on one another and on their peers. These activists took on big labor union bureaucrats, university administrations, and operated under the eye of the FBI and other policing agencies in the name of trying to create what they felt would be a better world for their communities by overthrowing capitalism. Their stories are at the heart of this project to show the power behind the ideologies they followed as well as their successes and failures in attempting to create a socialist revolution in the “belly of the beast” as one activist referred to the United States.

This dissertation is split into two parts. The first part explores the experiences of ATM members before they created the organization to the activism of the group once it was formed in May 1974 until 1978. Part II looks at the creation of the multi-racial League of Revolutionary Struggle to stress the connections and changes in the ideological approaches and the activist of ATM members that were a part of both groups. Many of the early members and founders of the ATM began their activism within the broader Chicana/o movement which is a political force among Mexican Americans during the 1960s when they adopted the term “Chicano” as a term of empowerment.

Chapter one explores the genesis and ideological development of various future members of the ATM to examine how they began as cultural nationalists and then organically moved towards Marxism despite the Cold War raging on. Each collective that would make up the ATM moved towards an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist stance. In order to understand the theory

and praxis of the ATM and later the League of Revolutionary Struggle, it is important to have a grasp of the early ideological development of ATM members as well as the forms of activism they participated in before they created the bigger organization.

Chapter two picks up when the ATM was formally founded at a Unity Congress held in Los Angeles in May, 1974. The four collectives that merged to create the ATM found a commonality in their approach to organizing and Marxism. The ideologies and structure of the newly minted organization that lasted until 1978 are the central focus. I explore how the members in the organization conducted study groups to create their ideological approaches to organizing. This chapter seeks to provide an organizational history including the different locations where they had districts. It also begins to address how the FBI followed the organization two months after they were founded to analyze how they were perceived by agents of the U.S. nation state.

Chapter 3 serves as a direct companion to chapter 2 in that I link how the ATM's ideologies influenced how they tried to apply what they were reading in their study groups to organizing. In particular, I provide brief sketches of two major strikes ATM members were a part of to explore how workers and major labor unions received their help. I also highlight two actions by the ATM on college campuses including at the California State University of Los Angeles and the University of California Santa Barbara. The group failed in many occasions due to a host of factors. This includes the FBI's surveillance that was keen on watching the group due to their labor union affiliations (affiliations which are highlighted in this chapter). The ATM's student activism is also important to highlight because the organization attempted to have political sway over Chicano studies and Chicano student groups across a variety of college campuses which I show. The members of the group maintained a tenacity for fighting against

institutions such as major labor unions and universities despite suffering losses so that they could obtain power and resources to create societal change.

Members of the ATM always held cordial and close relationships with organizations from other race-based social movements including Asian Americans and African Americans. In 1978 they merged with Asian American Marxist-Leninists and then in 1979 they did the same with African Americans. Part II of this dissertation focuses on the creation of this multiracial communist party known as the League of Revolutionary Struggle. Chapter four focuses on I Wor Kuen (IWK), a predominantly Chinese organization from the Asian American movement that organized in the Chinatowns of San Francisco and New York. It also explores the development of the African American cultural nationalist group the Congress of African People into the Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Communist League (RCL). Both IWK and RCL had their own distinct histories of activism and organizing that is important to acknowledge in order to explore how they merged.

Each of the respective histories of the ATM, IWK, and RCL led them on a path to creating a multinational communist party as they each advocated before creating the League. Chapter five explores in more detail the ideological orientation of the three organizations particularly around what is termed the national question. Based predominantly on the writings of Joseph Stalin, Vladimir Lenin, and other Marxist theoreticians the three organizations explored the idea of whether their respective racial groups constituted nations within the U.S. or if they were national minorities. Driven by discussions of democratic and national rights, self-determination, and sovereignty, the three groups wrote their own versions of historical narratives regarding the political, economic, and social development of their communities in the United States. For the ATM, the Chicano national question became one of the ways that they made an

impact in the Chicana/o movement which caused organizations like CASA to present their own approaches. All three organizations contribute to the intellectual legacy and canon of Marxist writers, despite being organic intellectuals and amateur historians. The groups found unity around these questions as well as participating in common organizing circles including the fights for affirmative action. The last portion of this chapter lays out the founding positions of the organization in order to begin extrapolating how this new group would organize in regards to the Chicana/o and Latina/ communities.

The last two chapters of this project focus in on how the League intersected their various forms of activism relating to Chicana/os and Latina/os including in labor, student activism, and electoral politics. Chapter five details the League's positions on their goals and ideologies in regards to what they called the Chicano National Movement. It explores their activism with student groups such as MEChA across the state of California as well as their rivalry with an organization known as Union del Barrio. The League was always treated as an outsider organization due to their multiracial make up and ideological orientation based on a white, and European canon that was from outside of the Chicana/o community as argued by some Chicana/o movement activists and organizations. However, the League centered their ideology around the fights for self-determination and believed that they could lead the Chicana/o movement based on their ideology of socialism for all. Their involvement in student groups and activism on college campus is the central focus in this chapter.

Chapter six picks up on the previous chapter in regards to the League's activism orientation by exploring their labor organizing. The group intersected their activism with students with labor unions such as the United Auto Workers to prevent the runaway of auto industry factories during the 1980s such as the Campaign to Keep General Motors Van Nuys

open. They also connected students and laborers in the activism to fight for better pay in the Watsonville Canning Strike which symbolically stresses that the League as well as the ATM before it took pride in organizing what they categorized as lower stratum workers. The League connected their different realms of activism as portrayed by their work with Reverend Jesse Jackson's two campaigns for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984 and 1988. The League brought Jackson to the various struggles they were active in such as Van Nuys and Watsonville and even wrote his speeches as I show. Chapter five and six show that the League despite not being just Chicana/o or cultural nationalist still maintained a focus on the issues facing Chicana/o and Latina/o communities. Thus, I show that the merger of ATM with other race-based organizations did not stop their ideological or organizing orientation. Instead they were able to make those issues broader by attracting other sympathizers.

The conclusion shows why the League of Revolutionary disbanded in 1990 in what former members describe as an abrupt end to the organization and not one of gradual decline. Different camps emerged after the Central Committee of the League decided to dissolve the organization especially after the events of Tiananmen Square. Essentially the majority of the Central Committee decided that Marxist-Leninist-Mao-Tse Tung Thought and socialism were no longer viable strategies to bettering the conditions for the people they sought to help. Others, however, argued for keeping the organization. I explore the debates between these two camps as well as how dissolution impacted some of the relationships League members had. By looking mainly at Chicana/o members of the League I investigate what dissolution meant for them and how relationships that existed since prior the founding of the ATM were impacted. I also provide updates in regards to what League activists did after the 1990 dissolution, often times highlighting what they are doing today. Many former members of the ATM and the League

indicate that they are the organizers and people they are today due to their participation in both Marxist-Leninist organizations. A few of the activists are still labor organizers while others have entered academia. Some also created their own community institutions but it is clear that many continue influencing the political and ideological development of current generations of activists while seeking to create structural and social change via the power and resources of institutions such as labor unions and universities.

Throughout this project I primarily use “Chicana/o” to refer to activists of Mexican American descent that self-defined themselves during *el movimiento* when they reclaimed the word “Chicano” for power purposes. Although they used “Chicano,” scholars have utilized a variety of new word choices to refer to activists of the era. I use Chicana/o to denote that the movement consisted of both Chicanas and Chicanos and that both had equal contributions to the movement. Although scholars have also used Chican@, Chicano/a, and currently Chicax I stick to Chicana/o throughout this project based on a historical moment. When I am referring to how the activists wrote about themselves or how they wrote in the ephemera and propaganda of the period I use Chicano since this is what was the common word during the moment in time.

I also follow a similar pattern when using the word Latina/o in regards to people from Latin American descent that were either born in the U.S. or immigrated to the country from places such as Central America or the Spanish speaking Caribbean. At certain points throughout the project, I use the categorizations of people based on their country of origin such as Salvadoran, Cuban, or Guatemalan when needed for context. It is understood that Latina/o is an umbrella term used to define distinct groups of people that can be problematic for being all encompassing and ignoring the nuances in differences among groups. Lastly, I also use Mexicano when referring to people from Mexico that were either still living in Mexico, or were

descendants from Mexico that chose not to define as Chicano. Defining oneself as Chicano was a political label that not everyone agreed with. Some believed Chicano limited activism into the United States and ignored Mexico and Mexicans in their approaches to organizing. Something as important as a label and how one self-identified changed over time during the period this project focuses on and explains how identities change based on experiences and ideologies.



## CHAPTER 1: The Origins of Chicana/o Marxism in the Late 1960s and 1970s

“Capitalism is the basic problem of the whole world right now. Everyplace in the world these capitalist, imperialist dogs are the ones that are killing people in Vietnam, and Guatemala, and Bolivia, and Mexico, here in this country, all over.”

-Cruz Olmeda Becerra, 1969

“And all around me activists were studying Marxism—the Black Panthers, in the Black Liberation Movement, the Young Lords in the Puerto Rican Struggle, the Red Guards and Kalayan among Asian-Pacific Islanders, among Native Americans. And internationally of course it seemed like every liberation movement was influenced and inspired by Marxism/Leninism. So my life was situated in a very power current of study and exploration of new ideas, and revolutionary practice”

-Bill Gallegos, 2015

Bill Gallegos, a former member of the primarily Chicana/o communist group, the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement (ATM), describes his participation in various Chicana/o movement organizations and the importance of Marxism-Leninism to his activist career and life.<sup>66</sup> Gallegos became politically involved in 1969 after hearing guest lecturer Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez, head of the Crusade for Justice, speak during the first Chicano studies class he took while at the University of Colorado.<sup>67</sup> During his previous years at the university he had never heard about the history of the Southwest, or of Colorado beyond family stories until he heard Corky speak and realized he was an oppressed Chicano.<sup>68</sup> Chicano, for Gallegos, was an assertion of something different. It was “understanding and reclaiming a history and culture that had been pushed to the side.”<sup>69</sup> He self-identified as a “typical” Chicano that was penalized for who he was. Gallegos joined the

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<sup>66</sup> Elle Leary and Anne Lewis, “Interview with Bill Gallegos” *Monthly Review* 26, no.5 (2015).

<sup>67</sup> The Crusade for Justice was an organization created in Denver, Colorado and is consistently linked to the leadership of Rodolfo “Corky Gonzalez.” The Crusade was one of the leading Mexican American, and Chicana/o, organizations during *el movimiento*. They led the urban civil rights and cultural movement struggles while also convening the first Chicano youth conference in 1969. For more see: Ernesto B. Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice: Chicano Militancy and the Government's War on Dissent* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

<sup>68</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

Crusade after hearing Corky speak to fight against police repression, building support for farmworkers, political representation, and the right to vote. During this period, he learned about Chicano nationalism that would stick with him during his activist life.

Gallegos moved to Northern California after his time in the Crusade.<sup>70</sup> Once there he joined the Brown Berets which were a paramilitary, and cultural nationalist organization styled after the Black Panther Party. He then joined La Raza Unida Party, a third political party formed by Chicana/os. His experiences in these three major Chicana/o movement organizations taught him about the Black Liberation struggle, social movements in Latin American including in Cuba, and ideas of anti-capitalism. Gallegos would go on to become a critical member of the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ATM when it was formed in 1974. He served as the national chairman for some time. While reflecting on his activism the time before becoming a Marxist-Leninist greatly shaped his political life.

Many other members of the ATM followed a similar path to joining the organization after participating in the same cultural nationalist groups as Gallegos. Therefore, in order to understand the genesis and the development of the ATM, as well as the ideologies of the Chicana/o movement, a look at the various organizations ATM members were first a part of is crucial for understanding how the group came to form. This chapter follows and analyzes the activism of some of the key members of the ATM before the group was created to examine the influence of the Chicana/o movement on the ideology and praxis of the organization before 1974. It explores how their pragmatic and practical activism in fighting things such as police brutality, for better working conditions, and social services served as people's first foray into social movement building.

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<sup>70</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

The political experiences in groups that followed nationalist ideologies in places such as Colorado, New Mexico, and especially in Southern and Northern California resulted in a search by men and women for alternative forms of organizing, including the ideologies of Marxism. *Chicanismo*, which was the vehicle used to express Chicana/o nationalism, was the dominant ideology articulated throughout the Chicana/o movement stressing community and self-determination.<sup>71</sup> Many of the people who became activists during the 1960s and 1970s were moved by cultural nationalism to become participants in the struggle for bettering Chicana/os position in society. Some of the major organizations during the time such as the Crusade for Justice, La Raza Unida Party, the Brown Berets, and an organization known as Los Siete de la Raza stressed race more than class or gender as organizing tools, at least initially. It is from these organizations that some activists including Gallegos began to discuss the creation of an organization based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism to address Chicana/os oppression around imperialism and capitalism in a global context with other liberation struggles going on around the world.

The histories of the collectives and the members that would go on to form the ATM are the central focus of this chapter. I first outline how the La Raza Workers Collective, the East Bay Labor Collective, the August 29<sup>th</sup> Collective, and the Albuquerque Collective manifested in their local geographical locations differently, yet at the same time similarly, that eventually led members to agree to form a unified organization. Upon outlining the history of each collective, I will then begin to show how they formed a group that would span across parts of the Southwest. The local histories are crucial to understanding how despite different day-to-day experiences by

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<sup>71</sup> Ernesto Chávez, *Mi Raza Primero: Nationalism Identity and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 7.

people in places such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, and Albuquerque they came to an understanding that something different from cultural nationalism was required.

Each collective came to the realization that an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and Marxist-Leninist revolutionary ideology was needed to create societal change for Chicana/os, Latina/os, and the broader working class in the United States by creating a communist society. Other similarities included the creation and utilization of printed ephemera, as was common during the time period. The activities and learned experiences such as producing newspapers were practical learning moments for the activists that created the ATM. Once the ATM formed in May of 1974, the group constantly looked back at their history that was grounded in the Chicana/o movement to understand how to move forward with new theories and activities during the 1970s. Oral histories with former activists clearly indicates that they were present at key events during the 1960s and 1970s that serve as emblematic moments in the development of what became a nationwide Chicana/o movement.<sup>72</sup>

The collectives were comprised of some college students, but the majority of the members were lower strata workers in factories and plants that became a crucial component to the membership of the ATM. Close to half, if not one-third, of the members were also Vietnam War veterans.<sup>73</sup> The organization was named after the intensely repressed 1970 Chicano Moratorium against the Vietnam War. Many of the members were in attendance at the gathering

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<sup>72</sup> A current trend in the historiography includes de-centering the Southwest Chicana/o movement. In particular, California, Texas, and Colorado received much of the attention during the onset of Chicana/o studies and the training of historians of Chicana/o history. New literature has shown that the movement extended beyond the Southwest including parts of the Pacific Northwest, the Midwest, and the South. For example, see: Jerry Garcia, ed., *We are Aztlán! Chicana Histories in the Northern Borderlands* (Pullman: Washington State Press, 2017); Juan Gómez-Quiñones and Irene Vasquez, *Making Aztlán: Ideology and Culture of the Chicana and Chicano Movement, 1966-1977* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014).

<sup>73</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 16, 2017.

and later chose to name their organization after the event.<sup>74</sup> Activism within the collectives included supporting workers struggles for better pay, pushing for the equality of languages in workplaces, organizing students on campuses, and creating study groups to apply the Marxist canon to their community's issues.

Activists such as Gallegos did not enter activism as full blown communists, socialists, Marxists, or other categorizations related to the Marxist canon, rather, they organically came to the theories and ideas via their activism in nationalist, or race-based, groups. I argue the interaction with nationalist ideologies, and then a frustration with a race-based framework, eventually swayed some activists to take up studying and practicing the ideas of Marxism. I utilize oral histories conducted at various times including the 1960s, 1980s, and the 2010s in tandem with archival documents from various Chicana/o movement organizations to show this.

Scholars have largely discussed the histories of the Crusade for Justice, the Brown Berets, Los Siete, and La Raza Unida Party in light of their nationalist ideologies.<sup>75</sup> However, by examining the members of these groups that moved toward Marxism, it can be argued that some people sought concepts based on class for understanding Chicana/os place in a capitalist and imperialist world. People took up the Marxist canon to organize workers and students, despite the fact that affiliation with communism was seen as anti-American during the Cold War. Why did activists such as Bill Gallegos take up Marxism, when so many other members of cultural nationalist Chicano/a groups did not? The activism of these groups and the influence they had on future ATM members cannot be denied. They learned strategic organizing skills such as creating coalitions with other racial groups, organizing strikes, and the need for reaching out to students

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<sup>74</sup> For more on how the Vietnam War influenced Chicana/o lives and activism as well as on the 1970 Moratorium see: Lorena Oropeza, *¡Raza Sí! ¡Guerra No! Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>75</sup> The most recent full-length monograph that includes the histories of these organizations in one location is Gómez-Quiñones and Vasquez, *Making Aztlán: Ideology and Culture of the Chicana and Chicano Movement*.

on college campuses to create support for the creation of a Chicano vanguard party. Most importantly, this chapter lays the foundation for understanding how the ATM and its members were first rooted in the Chicana/o movement before attempting to create a new multinational communist party that operated within *el movimiento* by maintaining close ties to the ideology of Chicana/o nationalism.

### **La Raza Workers Collective**

Joe Navarro recalls being about 15 years old and apolitical when the trial of seven Latino men began in 1969.<sup>76</sup> The organization he joined known as the *Comité Para Defender Los Siete de La Raza*, or the Defense for the Latino Seven, put him on a path towards becoming a Marxist-Leninist. Los Siete, as the organization was commonly referred to, formed in San Francisco in May 1969 to provide “legal counsel for seven Latin youths known as ‘Los Siete,’ charged with the murder of a policeman.”<sup>77</sup> The organization first began to create publicity for the case by working with liberals, black militants, and radicals but was later transformed into a full-blown community group which focused on the political, economic, and cultural empowerment of Latina/os.<sup>78</sup> Over time they linked the struggles against police repression and surveillance with ideas of U.S. imperialism and capitalism. After operating for a few years, members of Los Siete decided that Marxism was required to organize their communities.

The case became an emblematic moment that brought many people into an activist lifestyle that extended beyond support for the court case. Navarro believes if he had not come

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<sup>76</sup> Joe Navarro, interview by Eddie Bonilla, July 10, 2017.

<sup>77</sup> Report from special agent San Francisco Branch of Federal Bureau of Investigation, “AUGUST TWENTYNINTH MOVEMENT” July 20, 1976, index, pg. 31. Ernesto Chavez Collection of Chicano Movement FBI Records, 146, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles. The defendants were found not guilty on November 17, 1970, but were held on additional charges by San Mateo county, California. Some of the defendants were arrested for subsequent crimes and four failed to appear for their San Mateo trial and thus became fugitives.

<sup>78</sup> Jason M. Ferreira, “With the Soul of a Human Rainbow Los Siete, Black Panthers, and Third Worldism in San Francisco” in *Ten Years That Shook the City: San Francisco 1968-1978*, edited by Chris Carlsson and Lisa Ruth Elliot (San Francisco: City Lights Foundation Books, 2011).

into connection with the committee he would have continued being involved in the drug scene, harassed by police, been in prison or dead.<sup>79</sup> After the arrests of Los Siete, Navarro began attending boycotts organized by the United Farm Workers Union, started wearing a brown beret, and attended mini rallies in support of Los Siete after he had been expelled from school in 1970.<sup>80</sup>

The events of May 1, 1969 mobilized individuals in the Mission District such as Navarro who was increasingly becoming frustrated with the conditions in his community. He saw the rise of an “us vs them” mentality brewing in the schools against white administrators by people of color as well as opposition to police brutality that existed against African Americans and Latina/os.<sup>81</sup> The Mission District was and continues to be home to a large population of Central Americans but also included groups from South America, Cuba, and Mexico. Grounded in this specific pan-ethnic sociocultural space, Los Siete represented a distinctly Latina/o component of the wider Third World movement in the Bay Area.<sup>82</sup> As a result, the ATM would have many Central American members.

Joe Navarro saw poverty, crime, drugs, and policing brutality running rampant in the Valencia Garden housing projects in the district where he lived. The once military housing was converted to public housing after World War 2. The residents were predominantly African American or Latina/o. Pan-Latino activism was not uncommon in the area. The bulk of the seven teens indicted were of Central American descent and lived in the same area as Navarro. The

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<sup>79</sup> Joe Navarro, interview by Eddie Bonilla, July 10, 2017.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Tomás F. Summers Sandoval Jr, *Latinos at the Golden Gate: Creating Community and Identity in San Francisco* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 176.

<sup>82</sup> Scholars have written about the importance of the Mission District for fomenting cross-racial activism due to its diverse population. Latina/os, African Americans, and other racial groups lived closely together in the housing projects and also attended local high schools together. For more see: Summers Sandoval Jr., *Latinos at the Golden Gate*, Chapter 5; Ferreira, “With the Soul of a Human Rainbow Los Siete, Black Panthers, and Third Worldism in San Francisco,” 32.

families of four of Los Siete were from El Salvador and came to the United States in the early 1960s when a large Central American influx of migrants arrived to the United States. The others charged were Honduran or from Nicaragua.

Oscar Rios, whose brother Jose was one of the seven young teens indicted for murder after a violent encounter with two police officers in San Francisco's Mission District, was among the first to mobilize for the men.<sup>83</sup> Born in El Salvador, and brought to the Bay Area at the age of eleven, Oscar became a core member in Los Siete, the ATM, and eventually within the League of Revolutionary Struggle. His involvement in these groups would eventually lead to Rios becoming the first Salvadoran-born mayor in the United State in 1992 in Watsonville, California. A position he would serve in over five times into the 2000s.<sup>84</sup> He tried joining the Air Force after high school but was rejected because of his immigration status. Instead, he was recruited into a college readiness program run by Black and Latina/o activists at the nearby College of San Mateo. Five of the men arrested were students in this program, as well such as his brother Jose. Oscar and his brother lived in a neighboring housing project to Navarro. It was here that Navarro met Oscar after attending rallies in the projects that talked about police harassment, injustice, and the "continuation of oppression of our people."<sup>85</sup>

The experience transformed Oscar, and other Latina/o youth such as Donna Amador, Roberto Vargas, Roger Alvarado, Yolanda Lopez, and eventually Navarro to become activists.<sup>86</sup> Some individuals that attended the first meeting of the defense committee for Los Siete had

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<sup>83</sup> Marjorie Heins highlights the legal case and the histories of the different families involved in the case in. For the most detailed account of the court case and its outcomes see: Marjorie Heins, *Strictly Ghetto Property: Story of Los Siete de La Raza* (Berkeley: Ramparts Press, 1973).

<sup>84</sup> The League of Revolutionary Struggle was a multiracial communist organization that was the result of the merger between the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, I Wor Kuen (a Chinese American organization, and the Revolutionary Communist League (an African American organization) in 1978. For a more detailed analysis see part II of this dissertation and: Peter Shapiro, *Song of the Stubborn One Thousand: The Watsonville Canning Strike, 1985-1987* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

<sup>85</sup> Joe Navarro, interview by Eddie Bonilla, July 10, 2017.

<sup>86</sup> Summers Sandoval Jr., *Latinos at the Golden Gate*, 176.



direct ties to the Bay Area student movements including the 1968 strike at San Francisco State College.<sup>87</sup> Many of the accused in the case were well-known activists who were involved in the student movement at the College of San Mateo highlighting campus radicalism around the San Francisco Bay Area. These activists used their ties at college campuses and with Equal Opportunity Programs to recruit students to attend SFSC to diversify student populations.

Los Siete consisted of different ethnic and racial groups, including Salvadorans and Mexican Americans and was a pan-Latino group due to its close relationship to the Mission District. By early June, 1969 members decided the organization would become a radical alternative for organizing communities for self-determination. They branded themselves early as a revolutionary organization defending an entire community and advocated the linking of racial oppression to anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist policies. On November 19, 1970, their program included demands for “self-determination for La Raza (the race), all support of all revolutionary movements, the end of police brutality, all La Raza prisoners to be freed, and exemption of La Raza from military service.”<sup>88</sup> They connected the Vietnam war and the oppression facing “Raza” in the U.S. with broader revolutionary movements.

The close proximity of different racial groups in the Mission District and common histories of oppression, along with secondary types of education and a tense relationship with the police, helped to breed cross-racial activism that at times was rhetorical but also substantive. Los Siete solicited funds from other organizations in the San Francisco area to help with the legal

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<sup>87</sup> The strikes at San Francisco State College radicalized many students to continue their campus activism into their communities. Participants in the strike that sought the creation of Ethnic Studies programs went on to create community organizations such as the Los Siete Defense Committee, I Wor Kuen, and countless others. See: Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); William Barlow and Peter Shapiro, *End to Silence: The San Francisco State College Student Movement in the '60s* (New York: Pegasus, 1971).

<sup>88</sup> Report from special agent San Francisco Branch of Federal Bureau of Investigation, “AUGUST TWENTYNINTH MOVEMENT” July 20, 1976, index, pg. 31. Ernesto Chavez Collection of Chicano Movement FBI Records, 146, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles.

expenses for the men in prison. They received help from comrades in the Black Panther Party (BPP), including Emory Douglas the Minister of Culture in the BPP who lent assistance without any hesitation.<sup>89</sup> Oscar Rios recalls Bobby Seale, a co-founder of the Panthers, agreeing to give Los Siete one side of the Black Panther newspaper. In addition the BPP offered the “services of their attorney, Charles Garry, despite the fact that that he already had his hands full” representing both Seale and Huey P. Newton who were facing their own prison sentences.<sup>90</sup> The BPP also committed \$25,000 to the legal defense of Los Siete. Interactions with Seale and David Hilliard of the Panthers resulted in an important working relationship. In addition to the monetary and legal help the Panthers provided to Los Siete, they also gave microphone time at all of their local rallies and educational support for the group. Seale mentioned the arrested youth in a television interview and also met with their parents after the first meeting between the groups.<sup>91</sup>

Messages from the Panthers and leader Huey Newton appeared in early issues of Los Siete’s anti-imperialist newspaper *Basta Ya*. Newton wrote, “I want you to know that the BPP and the black community is behind you in your struggle 100%.”<sup>92</sup> He claimed that the Panthers would work to do everything possible until the youth were free and indicated that he found himself in a similar situation. He closed his message with “Black Power to Black People Brown Power to Brown People Power to All the Oppressed People of the World.” This phrase highlights

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<sup>89</sup> Ferreira, “With the Soul of a Human Rainbow Los Siete, Black Panthers, and Third Worldism in San Francisco,” 35.

<sup>90</sup>As quoted in: Ferreira, “With the Soul of a Human Rainbow Los Siete, Black Panthers, and Third Worldism in San Francisco,” 177. Newton was the minister of the BPP and was also facing a jail sentence. For more see: Aaron Byungjoo Bae, “‘The Struggle for Freedom, Justice, and Equality Transcends Racial and National Boundaries’ Anti-Imperialism, Multiracial Alliances, and the Free Huey Movement in the San Francisco Bay Area” *Pacific Historical Review* 86, Number 4, pps. 691-722.

<sup>91</sup> Ferreira, “With the Soul of a Human Rainbow Los Siete, Black Panthers, and Third Worldism in San Francisco.”

<sup>92</sup> Los Siete De La Raza, *Basta Ya*. Volume 1, No. 2, July 1972. Radicalism Collection, Special Collections Michigan State University.

a key link between Los Siete and organizations in the Bay Area that were not Chicana/o or Latina/o.

The Panthers and Los Siete were both anti-imperialist and many of the issues they organized around were similar, such as the role of the police in communities of color. Los Siete, and later the La Raza Workers Collective, provided bodies for various Panther rallies including the ones surrounding the release of Newton.<sup>93</sup> The two groups also conducted joint political education classes together and the influence of the Panthers is clear as it was for many other organizations in the Chicana/o movement. Joe Navarro was first invited to one of these study groups at the age of 17 and then became more active in the group. Questions asked in these classes were about imperialism, class struggle, and socialism.

Navarro considered himself an intellectual after he was invited to a study group held by Los Siete and the Black Panther Party. When he was about 17, and after he had dropped out from high school, he began seeking the group out more and was invited to a study group for those interested in developing “Marxist politics.”<sup>94</sup> He claims that he learned more in these classes than he had from his actual education. Los Siete used a study guide provided by the Venceremos Brigade which was an organization that took United States activists to visit revolutionary Cuba.<sup>95</sup> Some people who went to Cuba with the brigade later became members of Los Siete, La Raza Workers Collectives, or the ATM.

Marxist readings taken from the study guide included the *ABC of Socialism*, Mao Tse-Tung’s *On Practice* and *On Contradiction*, the *Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx, and

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<sup>93</sup> Bae, ““The Struggle for Freedom, Justice, and Equality Transcends Racial and National Boundaries’ Anti-Imperialism, Multiracial Alliances, and the Free Huey Movement in the San Francisco Bay Area,” pps. 691-722.

<sup>94</sup> Joe Navarro, interview by Eddie Bonilla, July 10, 2017.

<sup>95</sup> Van Gosse writes that ex-Students for a Democratic Society members organized the Venceremos Brigades that sent thousands of young radicals to Cuba from 1969-1970. There they joined work brigades to cut sugarcane while violating the United States’ embargo on travel to revolutionary Cuba. Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretative History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 195.

readings from Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, Amilcar Cabral, and Patricia Lumumba.<sup>96</sup> Navarro and other activists especially felt a connection to Guevara, Chi Minh, Cabral, and Lumumba because they were Third World revolutionaries that had taken on the “beast or monster,” the “mightiest power in the world” in the United States and they were successful.<sup>97</sup> The readings ranged from self declared Marxists to anti-imperialists and anti-capitalists. Readings from anti-imperialist authors were studied in the collective to learn about socialism and successful Third World revolutions to improve their community programs.

In the summer of 1969 the organization started serving the people in many of the same ways the Panthers had which took inspiration from Mao’s writings in this vein.<sup>98</sup> Some activists in the group and community members began to be turned off by the theory espoused by the organization. In order to legitimize the group in the minds of community members, they began platforms including a breakfast program at two churches in the heart of the Mission District that saw a daily attendance of 150 children. Los Siete members also ran a restaurant to provide a cheap alternative for families to purchase food such as beans, rice, and enchiladas for an affordable price.<sup>99</sup>

They also established a free medical clinic, a college recruitment center, and provided draft counseling. Los Siete began a clinic that provided legal defense from revolutionary minded lawyers to help with cases related to police brutality, drug busts, and immigration troubles.<sup>100</sup>

Navarro volunteered at *La Clinica de la Raza* providing free clinical screenings for patients. The

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<sup>96</sup> Joe Navarro, interview by Eddie Bonilla, July 10, 2017.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Mao Zedong, also referred to as Mao Tse-Tung, argued that activists needed to work and live among the activists they sought to organize. In his case, he was discussing people such as rural farmers as well as those at the point of production of products. Many activists in the later portion of the 1960s and 1970s that followed China’s model of socialism took a practical approach to serving their communities. Mao Tse-Tung, *On Practice and On Contradiction* (London: Verso Press, 2007).

<sup>99</sup> *Basta Ya*. Volume 1, No. 2, July 1972. Radicalism Collection.

<sup>100</sup> Ferreira, “With the Soul of a Human Rainbow Los Siete, Black Panthers, and Third Worldism in San Francisco,” 180.

group also supported efforts at San Francisco State College for the establishment of Ethnic studies.<sup>101</sup> Many of the former members indicate that being present on campuses across the Bay Area brought them into activism. This was not uncommon during the time. Los Siete was beginning to put in to practice what they learned from Mao's ideas of serving the people.

The organization reached different communities through *Basta Ya* which grew to a circulation of thousands per month after 1969. *Basta Ya* initially appeared on the backside of the Panther's political organ *The Black Panther*. Los Siete reached a national audience due to this exposure. It began as a four-page mimeographed newsletter in English and Spanish to reach both audiences. After their meeting with Bobby Seale and the Panthers, Los Siete used the press support from the larger organization to become a full-fledged bilingual effort to educate their community. The publication of joint newspapers highlights the close working relationships Los Siete, and later the La Raza Workers Collective, had with other groups.

They envisioned themselves as a part of what 19<sup>th</sup> century Cuban anti-imperialist Jose Marti called *Nuestra América*—or, perhaps as they stated “more precisely, within the revolutionary current of Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara’s explicitly Marxist Pan-Latin Americanism.”<sup>102</sup> The newspaper reflects that the members in the organization increasingly saw themselves as a part of the struggles going on in Latin America and the world as well as a growing pan-Latin American position. The newspaper preached an ideology based on Marxism on a variety of topics not limited to critiquing U.S. imperialism but also covering tenant's rights and educational campaigns. They reported on the struggles of the BPP, the American Indian movement, and guerilla campaigns in Latin America. The group reprinted articles from other sources such as the

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<sup>101</sup> Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus*. Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies*.

<sup>102</sup> Ferreira, “With the Soul of a Human Rainbow Los Siete, Black Panthers, and Third Worldism in San Francisco,” 38.

*Black Panther* and *El Grito del Norte*, a critical newspaper from New Mexico during the Chicana/o movement.<sup>103</sup>

A brief analysis of the newspaper indicates a development over time towards focusing on the Mission District, the Latina/o community, and struggles in San Francisco in context with broader global struggles against capitalism and imperialism.<sup>104</sup> Themes such as opposing political prisoners is clear and remained with activists throughout their political lives. Calls for liberating political prisoners such as African American communist Angela Davis, Huey Newton, and Los Siete were situated as an opportunity to form a united front with the Communist Party. Relationships with white liberals, the BPP, and other groups within the Bay Area extended to the pages of *Basta Ya*. The paper transitioned from mostly coverage about the court case of Los Siete to providing more coverage of struggles in the Third World.

Members of Los Siete decided around 1972 that a Marxist collective was necessary because the group still felt that “oppressed nationality people” were in an ongoing battle against imperialism and capitalism.<sup>105</sup> The La Raza Workers Collective was then created in 1973 and consisted primarily of working class teens in their early 20s such as Navarro who had become a full member of Los Siete by 1972. It was comprised of Chicana/os, Cubans, Salvadorans, and Ecuadorians. It continued to be representative of the Mission District. They decided the group was going to organize the working class consciously by entering factories to organize workers.

Most in the collective had very little formal education and continued studying theories in a similar fashion to what they did in Los Siete. There were no college graduates in the group yet

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<sup>103</sup> For more on the role of *El Grito del Norte* in the Chicano Movement see: Enriqueta Vazquez, Dionne Espinoza, and Lorena Oropeza, eds., *Enriqueta Vazquez and the Chicano Movement: Writings from El Grito del Norte* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2006).

<sup>104</sup> For more of a content analysis of the newspaper see: Adriana Diaz, “The Case of Los Siete de la Raza: An Historical Examination and Content Analysis” (Master’s Thesis., San Jose State University, 2006).

<sup>105</sup> Joe Navarro, interview by Eddie Bonilla, July 10, 2017.

they still continued to vigorously study Marxist literature, philosophy, and political economy to “make sense of the world.”<sup>106</sup> Mandatory four-hour meetings per week along with eight hours of study group were expected in order to discuss the literature. Members held each other accountable and there was “no faking the study sessions.”<sup>107</sup> Dynamic discussions took place but Navarro notes that since it was fairly young men and women working, reading, and discussing Marxist literature they were able to have days that lasted longer than 16 hours.

Everybody in the collective was expected to get a job in a factory. Many members such as Navarro worked at the Levi Strauss Factory in San Francisco. Navarro had first worked as a mattress worker and eventually received a foundry job across the bay in Berkeley. Despite not having a high school diploma, he was able to obtain a union job that could support a family. Pacific Steel Casting, according to Navarro, was one of the biggest foundries at the time in California and had about 250 employees. The company employed whites, Latina/os, African Americans, and Portuguese workers. He remembers producing metal castings as a metal pourer, a particularly dangerous occupation. Navarro eventually learned how to become active in the labor union in his work site which is where he met Bill Gallegos who was involved with La Raza Unida Party in the East Bay that would later become the East Bay Labor Collective. The two along with Lian Mann, another eventual member of the ATM, worked closely together to get Navarro elected as president of the Molders Union in the foundry after the ATM was formed.

The experiences of Navarro and Oscar Rios as members of Los Siete would follow them into the ATM and during their activist political lives. The collective believed their coalitions with other groups such as the Black Panthers created opportunities further down the line for

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<sup>106</sup> Joe Navarro, interview by Eddie Bonilla, July 10, 2017.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

building support for workplace struggles.<sup>108</sup> They also participated in the anti-Vietnam war effort in the San Francisco area. The initial study groups around the Marxist canon served Navarro and Rios when they became members of the ATM when studies were ramped up.

### **The East Bay Labor Collective**

The East Bay Labor Collective formed in Oakland, California in 1973 across the San Francisco Bay from La Raza Workers Collective and developed mostly out of La Raza Unida Party (LRUP). The activists, including Bill Gallegos, fought to create revolutionary elements within LRUP. They sought to generate a mass struggle to improve the conditions for workers. This group broke off from the Southern Alameda Chapter of LRUP to become active in the labor movement in the East Bay, the cities along the eastern shore of the San Francisco Bay. The collective, and later the ATM, maintained a strong presence in cities such as Fremont, Union City, Oakland, Berkeley, Alameda, and Newark.

Gallegos moved to the Bay Area after graduating from the University of Colorado in 1970. It is important to note that Gallegos did not just physically travel to the area but his experiences in Denver and in the Crusade for Justice moved with him as well. The Crusade opened a “whole world” to him by exposing him to speakers from the Black Liberation movement including H. Rap Brown and Angela Davis.<sup>109</sup> He also listened to speakers from the American Indian Movement and participated in major boycotts such as the one against Coors Brewery. Gallegos remembers going down to *cantinas* to try and sway bar owners and beer connoisseurs from drinking Coors since it was practicing racial discrimination in their hiring

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<sup>108</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, “Statements on the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle (Marxist-Leninist)” undated. Radicalism Collection, Special Collections, Michigan State University.

<sup>109</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.



policies.<sup>110</sup> He also did work to support the United Farm Workers and overall felt that the Crusade provided “so many avenues for young people.”<sup>111</sup>

Gallegos was also exposed to the Socialist Workers Party and the Communist Party USA who sold their newspapers and distributed ideas of Marxism to individuals in the Denver area. What struck Gallegos the most about these groups was that Cuba was considered a good place, instead of being seen as an enemy as was the case in the mainstream during the time.<sup>112</sup> He began to further understand the struggles in Latin America in the context of what was going on to Chicana/os, African Americans, and Native Americans within the U.S. Although the Crusade was nationalist in its ideas and not Marxist, it did lean heavily towards anti-capitalism. The organization taught Gallegos what it meant to build autonomous institutions within the Chicana/o community. This included a K-12 school called *Escuela Tlatelolco* that closed in 2017 after being open for 46 years as a dual-language alternative school. Gallegos’ time in the Crusade put him into contact with wider movements going on nationally during the early 1970s which he would continue to be a part of after moving to Northern California.

Gallegos joined the Southern Alameda County Brown Berets upon his arrival to the Bay Area due to his cousin being a member of the cultural nationalist paramilitary organization modeled after the Black Panther Party. Once in the organization Gallegos and the Berets organized around police brutality. The Berets created social programs similar to those of the BPP including a breakfast program, a clinic known as *La Clínica Tiburcio Vasquez*, and a film series where they showed films about the Vietnam War.<sup>113</sup> Gallegos considers that the Southern

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<sup>110</sup> For more on the Coors Brewery boycott, its relation to its discriminatory hiring practices, and the Chicana/o movement see: Allyson Brantley, “‘We’re Given’ Up Our Sweeter Wine’: Boycotting Coors Beer, Coalition-Building, and the Politics of Non-Consumption, 1957-1987” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2016).

<sup>111</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Tiburcio Vasquez was a California bandit from the 1800s that became a symbolic figure for Chicana/o activists.

Alameda chapter of the Berets was on the left wing of the national organization and were being constantly suspended by David Sanchez, national chairman of the group, for studying Marxism. Sanchez in many ways represents the views of other Chicana/o movement activists towards ideologies of the left. This shows there was hostility towards Marxism from within the ranks of *el movimiento* on top of government surveillance. The chapter maintained a close relationship with the BPP and the Socialist Workers Party, especially against the war in Vietnam. Gallegos obtained further experience working with leftist groups and other organizations before deciding to attend law school.

After his experiences in the Bay Area, Gallegos moved back to the University of Colorado to obtain a law degree. He was able to attend law school through a Council on Legal Education Opportunity fellowship designed to get “Black, Brown, and Natives” to law school. When he got back on to campus Gallegos and others decided to shut down the law school over how they chose faculty and the material being taught to future lawyers. They wanted classes relevant to their experiences and to “talk about the legality of annexation,” while calling for more community input on campus. After a year of law school, however, Gallegos decided he did not want to move forward but his experiences on the campus brought him into contact with student activists like Ricardo Falcon a prominent activist from Colorado that was later killed on his way to a LRUP convention in 1972.

Gallegos chose to return to the Bay Area instead of finishing law school. Upon his return he met whom he described as a “brother out of Union City,” a Special Forces veteran who had fought in Vietnam and was active in LRUP. This “brother” had visited Cuba with the Venceremos Brigade and became the person who really introduced him to Marxism.<sup>114</sup> The Berets for Gallegos were becoming narrowly focused and he felt that the work LRUP was doing

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<sup>114</sup> Leary and Lewis, “Interview with Bill Gallegos.”

in the political realm could build actual power. He decided to resign from the Berets to join the Southern Alameda chapter of LRUP that went on to become the EBLC.

Activists like Gallegos cite that their involvement in La Raza Unida Party as providing practical and lifelong organizing experience. Several chapters in California, New Mexico, and Texas began to seriously study Marxism-Leninism by 1973 as told by Gallegos.<sup>115</sup> Created as a third political party, LRUP originated in Crystal City, Texas to challenge the two major political parties in the U.S. political realm in 1970. The party won political positions of power in Texas and later branched out across the nation including to Colorado, New Mexico, and California. Disputes over whether the party should be for electoral politics or a social revolution manifested among local chapters to question their work within the organization. People including Gallegos became disillusioned with the process of only registering people to vote for a third political party, and began to feel that organizing workers in foundries and factories was just as important.

LRUP was an effort by Chicana/os towards reforming national political parties. It was neither against the Democratic Party nor pro-Republican either. Platform resolutions at a Texas state convention in October 1970 ranged from issues including health, education, economics, and the second-class citizenship of women.<sup>116</sup> The party organized around other issues such as immigration, military service, healthcare and welfare as political and social topics. LRUP did not advocate communism but rather believed that “all people have the inherent right to determine what form of government they should be governed by,” or in other words the right to self-determination.<sup>117</sup> The best form of government, argued LRUP, is that which was natural to “our

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<sup>115</sup> Leary and Lewis, “Interview with Bill Gallegos.”

<sup>116</sup> Pamphlet, “What is Raza Unida Party” box 1, folder 1, Raza Unida Party Records, 1969-1979, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>117</sup> La Raza Unida Party, “Organizers Handbook I: How to Establish the Party at Precinct and County Levels,” pg. 16, box 2, folder 4, Raza Unida Party Records, 1969-1979, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.

people.” The clear distinction in utilizing the word “natural” shows a conscious decision towards being hesitant to accepting ideologies from outside the Chicana/o community.

The first chapter in California was an Oakland-Berkeley chapter formed on November 22, 1970.<sup>118</sup> About sixty activists met in Oakland in October, 1970 and agreed to form LRUP chapters starting with the Bay Area. Armando Navarro, a former member and a political scientist, calls the years from 1970 to 1972 the golden years of organizing for LRUP in California.<sup>119</sup> Efforts sprang up throughout the state to establish an alternative to the Democratic and Republican parties. Navarro notes that California posed different circumstances than organizing in Texas. Different organizing strategies, ideologies, and ideas about what the party should be arose in the state. Differences germinated between Northern and Southern California chapters, as well as chapters in short distances from one another. For example, some Northern California chapters saw “raza” as meaning Chicanos or Mexican Americans while others advocated expanding LRUP to include Puerto Ricans and Latina/os. At the same time, however, chapters with common ideas for strategizing would come into contact with one another and form agreements on utilizing Marxism.

Ideology quickly became a major point of debate and division among the various chapters. Ideas around revolutionary nationalism, progressive nationalism, liberalism, Marxism, and other isms became points of contestation among the rank and file in the party. The party’s time in California is best summarized as fragmented due to activists like Gallegos pushing different agendas. After a California regional meeting in San Jose in April 1972 with an attendance of some 500 people the ideological tensions flourished. The debate became whether the California party should emphasize electoral victory or if it should become a broader Latina/o

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<sup>118</sup> Carlos Jr. Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (New York: Verso Press, 1989), 132.

<sup>119</sup> Armando Navarro, *La Raza Unida Party: A Chicano Challenge to the U.S. Two-Party Dictatorship* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

and Third World constituency. California's definition of "La Raza" was to mean those who "came from Mexico and Central and South America and their descendants" due to the Oakland and San Francisco areas having a large number of Latina/os from various parts of Latin America.<sup>120</sup> Many student organizers in California chapters were involved with the Socialist Workers Party, the Communist Party, and the Brown Berets which exacerbated the ideological tendencies ranging from cultural nationalism to socialism.

At the statewide 1972 conference in San Jose the goal was to consolidate the fragmented chapters across the Bay Area and California. Resolutions were passed to become directly involved in union organizing of Mexican workers by direct actions including boycotts, strikes, and picketing.<sup>121</sup> Communication centers were created at the conference to create more dialogue between the chapters. Bill Gallegos and Lucia Aguilar became key figures in the distribution of a newsletter *La Voz Del Barrio* which represented the Newark, Fremont, Union City, and Hayward chapters in the East Bay. Aguilar as described by Gallegos was an East Bay Chicana student that organized on college campuses. She was involved in struggles for increasing Chicano admissions, financial support, Chicano Studies, and in support of the United Farm Workers as a member of El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (The Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán, MEChA). Aguilar spoke out against the oppression of women within the Chicana/o movement while leading workplace and community organizing. Male activists as told by Gallegos were "totally threatened" by Aguilar even saying things such as "she had the biggest balls in the Chicano movement."<sup>122</sup> She would go on to be a key leader of the ATM's labor unit.

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<sup>120</sup> Navarro, *La Raza Unida Party: A Chicano Challenge to the U.S. Two-Party Dictatorship*, 137.

<sup>121</sup> La Raza Unida Party Organizing Committees Southern Region Letter to La Raza Unida Party Organizing Committees Southern Region "On the Status of La Raza Unida Party in Califas, Aztlan: A Position Paper," August 21, 1972, Box 61, José Angel Gutiérrez Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>122</sup> Leary and Lewis, "Interview with Bill Gallegos."

Gallegos and Aguilar in a November 27, 1972 printing of *La Voz* were listed as alternates for chapter representatives to state and nationwide meetings.<sup>123</sup> Aguilar served as a delegate to the El Paso National Convention held in September of 1972 where the vote was cast for who would become the president of LRUP according to *La Voz* reporting.<sup>124</sup> The biweekly and bilingual newsletter represented *Norte*, or Northern California, but reported on local, state-level, and national stories. It consisted of articles and editorials while serving as a newsletter to other chapters of LRUP in regards to the work taken up by the Northern California LRUP members.

Aguilar and Gallegos figured prominently in the production of the paper. Gallegos even served as the secretary of correspondence around 1973. Articles covered in *La Voz* included issues surrounding labor, housing, child labor, and other topics among the Latina/o community. Local and state political debates and elections were also featured in the paper to help readers understand various voting propositions. Reports by delegates to national LRUP conventions were also published for the *Norte* activist audiences. This also included reports on LRUP activities involving workers at General Motor plants and other factories across California.<sup>125</sup> Advertisements for work at a General Motors Assembly plant in Fremont were also featured and listed Bill Gallegos as a point of contact.<sup>126</sup> GM factories, including the one in Fremont and the larger auto industry, would become a key site of the ATM's and the League's labor organizing.

Some members from the Southern Alameda chapter of LRUP, including Aguilar and Gallegos, eventually decided to split off and create the East Bay Labor Collective to focus

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<sup>123</sup> El Partido de la Raza Unida Norte California, *La Voz Del Barrio*. November 27, 1972, Box 61, José Angel Gutiérrez Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>124</sup> Navarro, *La Raza Unida Party: A Chicano Challenge to the U.S. Two-Party Dictatorship*, 234. Corky Gonzalez and José Angel Gutiérrez were the two people running for president of the organization. A rift was created between the two camps over the direction of LRUP. Gutierrez was ultimately appointed.

<sup>125</sup> El Partido de la Raza Unida Norte California, *La Voz Del Barrio*. October 20, 1972, Box 61, José Angel Gutiérrez Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

specifically on organizing workers. The chapter started studying Marxism and decided they had to go to the “point of production” because Chicano liberation would be won in the context of socialism.<sup>127</sup> The EBLC entered workplaces but also studied Marxism around the questions of what was the nature of the struggle of Chicana/o people and what did people mean by their calls for Chicano power? The members began these discussions as they started doing other forms of work.

Members of the collective focused primarily on workplace organizing as well as anti-war efforts.<sup>128</sup> They did work with farm workers in California but were prevented by Cesar Chavez because of their affiliation to Marxism-Leninism.<sup>129</sup> The EBLC waged a “bitter struggle” against the “reformism of Cesar Chavez, and opposed his class collaborationist line” with a line of revolutionary class struggle.<sup>130</sup> Struggles against union led movements by the United Farmer Workers and the Teamsters Union by the collective foreshadowed the struggles the ATM would have against major labor unions.

### **The August 29<sup>th</sup> Collective**

Cruz Olmeda Becerra was one of the nine founding members of the Brown Berets in East Los Angeles and served as a chairman in the organization. His experiences within cultural nationalist organizations such as the Berets eventually led him to become the first chairman of the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement.<sup>131</sup> Becerra was also famously indicted as one of the 13 East LA defendants. He was a Vietnam War veteran with a scholarship to attend the University of

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<sup>127</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

<sup>128</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle “Statements on the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle (Marxist-Leninist),” 83.

<sup>129</sup> The ATM by the 1970s were the only group accusing Cesar Chavez of reformism and classism as detailed in Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun*, 163.

<sup>130</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle “Statements on the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle (Marxist-Leninist),” 80.

<sup>131</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Gerald Rosen, December 23, 1978, Chicano Students in Los Angeles [OHP 226] Center for Oral and Public History California State University, Fullerton.

California, Irvine when he was arrested for his role in helping high school students walkout of school to fight for better conditions in Latina/o schools.<sup>132</sup> Becerra's political development began after being a founder of the Berets. He later split from the organization after moving towards Marxism. Then, along with his friend James "Jimmy" Franco, he helped to create a Labor Committee within La Raza Unida Party that focused on labor struggles. Their involvement in LRUP brought them into contact with activists from the East Bay and San Francisco as early as 1972 when they began holding state-wide meetings and conventions. The Labor Committee later became the August 29<sup>th</sup> Collective. This collective was considered by some former ATM members as the most advanced of the groups that created the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement and also had the most organizational infrastructure in place.<sup>133</sup>

The August 29<sup>th</sup> Collective in Los Angeles traced its roots within nationalist organizations and largely stemmed from the Brown Berets, an organization that formed similar to the Black Panther Party against national oppression, and from LRUP.<sup>134</sup> The Brown Berets developed in East Los Angeles in response to the oppression faced by Chicana/o youth in schools and against police brutality in 1967 after changing their name from the Young Chicanos for Community Action. The Berets provided protection during the East L.A. blowouts in 1968 by students at various high schools seeking changes to the Los Angeles Unified School District education system.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Ian F. Haney Lopez, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003).

<sup>133</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

<sup>134</sup> For more on the influence of the Black Panther Party on the Brown Berets see: Jeffrey Ogbonna Green Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). The groups followed a similar militaristic, masculine and hierarchical nature. Most of the Beret leaders were men and according to Ernesto Chavez supports the claim that the organizations had a masculine orientation. See: Ernesto Chávez, "Birth of a New Symbol: The Brown Berets' Gendered Chicano National Imaginary" in *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America* edited by Joe Austin and Michael Willard, (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

<sup>135</sup> The blowouts involved students from numerous high schools protesting the second-class school systems they were a part of. Many of the students that participated in these walkouts went on to become influential figures in



They followed a cultural nationalist style of organizing that believed in a militant agenda to protect the Chicana/o community. A community organization grounded in the ideas of cultural nationalism, self-determination, and *chicanismo*, the Berets led by Prime Minister David Sanchez were not welcoming to ideas of Marxism. In a 2015 *testimonio*, former Brown Beret Gloria Arellanes claimed, “I don’t recall much of a Marxist influence on us. I think we had been affected by the anti-Marxism of the Cold War and the fear of communism.”<sup>136</sup> She also states “I don’t remember anyone in the Berets saying that they were Marxists, much less communists. I knew some, such as Carlos Montes and Raul Vega, who read Mao’s *Little Red Book* and believed in some of those concepts and quoted Ho Chi Minh and Angela Davis.”<sup>137</sup> Arellanes from her oral history with García forcefully states that many saw Marxism as outside of the community that was a philosophy they were not interested in. The Brown Beret leader David Sanchez had a deep fear of communism, which caused disagreements amongst the group. For Sanchez, Marxism was a “white European ideology” not rooted in the Mexican American experience.

Carlos Muñoz, another former Beret and now Professor Emeritus from the University of California Berkeley, recalled in a 1978 interview that the Berets purged Maoists, Trotskyites, and

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the Chicana/o movement. For more on the 1968 blowouts see: Darius V. Echeverria, *Aztlán Arizona: Mexican American Educational Empowerment, 1968-1978* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014); Mario T. García and Sal Castro, *Blowout! Sal Castro & the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Mexican Students Por La Raza: The Chicano Student Movement in Southern California, 1967-1977* (Santa Bárbara: Editorial La Causa, 1978).

<sup>136</sup> For more on the discussions surrounding memory studies, oral histories, and the *testimonio* tradition see: Steve Stern, *Remembering Pinochet’s Chile: On the Eve of London, 1998* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Daniel James, *Dona Maria’s Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). James conducts an oral history with a former activist during the and after the Juan Peron regime in Argentina. The study shows the challenges and benefits of conducting life histories. See also: Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastull and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York: State University of New York Press, Albany, 1991).

<sup>137</sup> Mario T. García, *The Chicano Generation: Testimonios of the Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 139.

the Communist Party because the ideals of those groups were not a “chicano thing.”<sup>138</sup> He concluded that “our people are turned off in terms of the communist thing” and includes that Chicanos were very obedient to the Catholic church. Thus, communism was seen by some as outside of the Chicano community and as a “white,” foreign, European, ideology.

Some Berets struggled against what they called narrow nationalists within the group who were hesitant towards creating alliances with other nationalities. This group broke off from the Berets to create a core to study Marxism-Leninism. Like the Black Panthers, some of the founding members of the Berets expressed a “fondness for Marxism, with some of them also seeking guidance in the writings of Mao Zedong and arguing for the need to be ‘one of the masses of the people.’”<sup>139</sup> Becerra remembers Beret members carrying the pocket sized writings of Mao’s *Little Red Book* along with wearing pins connected to the movement in China.<sup>140</sup>

In 1968 seven of the original nine founding members of the Brown Berets including Becerra established a group called La Junta that believed Marxism and Maoism was required to help the community transcend the narrow cultural nationalism espoused by the Berets.<sup>141</sup> According to Becerra in a 1969 interview, La Junta was created after tensions arose within the Brown Berets over members such as Becerra and several others taking Mao’s words to heart by insisting that the Berets be transformed into a militia in the service of the community.<sup>142</sup> He believed that an ideal society would be a communist one and even closes the interview by saying “Viva Mao.”<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Carlos Muñoz interview by Gerald Rosen, January 14, 1968, Chicano Students in Los Angeles [OHP 226] Center for Oral and Public History California State University, Fullerton.

<sup>139</sup> Chávez, “Birth of a New Symbol: The Brown Berets’ Gendered Chicano National Imaginary,” 214.

<sup>140</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Gerald Rosen, December 23, 1978, Chicano Students in Los Angeles [OHP 226] Center for Oral and Public History California State University, Fullerton.

<sup>141</sup> Chávez, *Mi Raza Primero*, 51.

<sup>142</sup> Chávez, “Birth of a New Symbol: The Brown Berets’ Gendered Chicano National Imaginary,” 214.

<sup>143</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Gerald Rosen on January 31, 1969, Chicano Students in Los Angeles [OHP 226] Center for Oral and Public History California State University, Fullerton.

Becerra felt that the Berets were being narrow and were not being bold enough in their attempts to reach a broad mass of people. For his part, Sanchez was afraid of Marxism because he knew firsthand the violent police repression they would face if the Berets followed a Marxist direction. The Berets received severe police repression even though they held onto cultural nationalist ideals, while the group that broke away to form La Junta also faced police repression as members of the ATM.<sup>144</sup>

In an interview reflecting on the Chicana/o movement, former Brown Beret member Ralph Ramirez recalls the differences between Becerra and Sanchez over political and philosophical issues.<sup>145</sup> Personality differences were tied to Sanchez's rejection of political labels that were seen as white and European. Ramirez noted that Sanchez "rejected any kind of relationship with Marxists and with socialist types" who others in the group viewed as potential allies. La Junta members, according to Ramirez, were constantly involved in shootouts and had issues with drugs, drinking, and plants from the Los Angeles Police Department after they split with the Brown Berets. He believed these were the issues that resulted in La Junta splitting due to police intervention.

La Junta went on to recruit former gang members and aligned themselves with former members of the Communist Party. Ramirez and others claim La Junta "were from the street" and organized *vatos locos*, a slang phrase for people from the streets. The group consisted of former and current gang members opposed to the Berets who maintained membership from young college and high school students between 16-20 years of age. The recruitment of gang members

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<sup>144</sup> Many Chicana/o movement organizations faced repression, infiltration, and surveillance from local and national police enforcement such as the LAPD and the FBI. Edward Escobar, "The Dialectics of Repression: The Police Department and the Chicano movement, 1968-1971" *The Journal of American History* 79, No. 4 (March 1993): 1483-1514

<sup>145</sup> Ralph Ramirez, interview by Gerald Rosen, November 1978, Chicano Students in Los Angeles [OHP 226] Center for Oral and Public History California State University, Fullerton.

was another point of contention for Becerra and Sanchez. La Junta provided services to gang members such as education courses, drug prevention, rehab programs, and job training. Becerra and the others who left the Berets felt these members of the East Los Angeles society were being ignored and needed to be organized.<sup>146</sup>

According to Becerra, La Junta members would “bullshit around smoke weed and drink” to talk with gang members and then would “start talking about collectivism.”<sup>147</sup> They were taking a Marxist-Leninist ideology and making it their philosophy. “What we are doing is we’re taking a philosophy that already exists in the barrios and just explaining it,” Becerra stated in a 1969 interview. He gives an example about socialism later in the interview and what it meant to talk about Marxism with “street dudes.” He claimed that Mexican prisoners “helping each other and contributing” in the “sharing of wine, cigarettes” and passing around joints was “Marxism man.” The practice of helping with funeral expenses in Latina/o communities is another example of Marxism that “always existed in barrios.”<sup>148</sup> Becerra, as claimed by Carlos Muñoz Jr, was one of the most intellectual members of the original Brown Berets and it shows in his belief in the practicality of bringing the ideals of Marxism and socialism to historically violent street gangs. Becerra believed La Junta was being successful in discussing the ideas of imperialism, socialism, and revolution with folks who were smoking and doing heroin.

The group received major criticisms from other Chicana/o movement organizations but they were attempting the organizing of what Marx, Engels, and the Black Panthers called the

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<sup>146</sup> La Junta believed in organizing criminals, gang members, and other groups of people who were deemed not fit to be organized by other organizations. Like the Black Panther Party, La Junta referred to these groups as the lumpen-proletariat. This was believed to be a class that could not be organized at the bottom of society’s social order including people who were deemed criminals. The Black Panther Party are synonymous with attempting to organize this class to create a societal revolution. For more on the development of the term and how it applied to community organizing see: Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

<sup>147</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Gerald Rosen, January 31, 1969, Chicano Students in Los Angeles [OHP 226] Center for Oral and Public History California State University, Fullerton.

<sup>148</sup> Becerra interview by Gerald Rosen, January 31, 1969.

lumpen-proletariat. Ramirez believed police plants contributed to a split that occurred in La Junta later in 1969 citing examples of people constantly pulling guns on each other that led to several incidents where shoot-outs ensued. This could be a by-product of organizing gang members from rival territories, but it was not beyond the Los Angeles Police Department to infiltrate organizations such as the Brown Berets and La Junta in their attempts to destroy them from the inside by promoting violent acts.<sup>149</sup>

Becerra took a year off from the Chicana/o movement after La Junta split in 1969. He focused on working and attending school before he was approached in 1971 by his friend James Franco, known as Jimmy in the movement. Franco contacted Becerra about attending a meeting of LRUP on the campus of California State University Los Angeles where he was a professor.<sup>150</sup> They attended the meeting and came to the realization that instead of creating a geographic chapter like those found in Northern California they should create a labor committee. They petitioned the Los Angeles Central Committee of LRUP and won the opportunity to create a Labor Committee chapter. It was to be dedicated to organizing workers in the Los Angeles area and functioned as its own chapter. The committee was interested in registering voters, but they also believed they could go beyond that to focus on “raising the consciousness of laborers and supporting strikes and boycotts.”<sup>151</sup> Former Brown Berets and La Junta members such as Rodolfo Quinones, and Daniel Estrada joined Becerra and Franco in organizing the committee to address labor issues for the political party because they felt the workers in the Los Angeles area were being ignored by their labor unions. It must be noted that there was no direct link from the

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<sup>149</sup> For more on the LAPD and the FBI’s surveillance and infiltration of the Brown Berets see: Chávez, *Mi Raza Primero*; Haney Lopez, *Racism on Trial*; Escobar, “The Dialectics of Repression: The Police Department and the Chicano movement, 1968-1971.”

<sup>150</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 16, 2017.

<sup>151</sup> Chávez, *Mi Raza Primero*, 93.

Brown Berets and La Junta to the committee, but rather people involved in the organizations linked together again after a year of being separated.

The committee became recognized by some laborers throughout LA by the way they raised the consciousness of workers and for the support they provided for labor strikes and boycotts.<sup>152</sup> Initially they began with registering workers to vote because that was the primary function of LRUP. Becerra with the help of others conducted a voter drive at the General Motors plant in South Gate, California. During the swing shift they were successful in registering workers to LRUP. It was during this drive that the Labor Committee began to further ask why LRUP was not attempting to organize such workers. The more they spoke to workers they believed that a revolution beyond the ballot box was required. They began to feel that LRUP was not a revolutionary organization despite being a democratic group that was doing important things for the Chicana/o community. They argued workplace organizing was as important as winning democratic elections.<sup>153</sup>

The Labor Committee developed into a unionist wing of the party and became an “avowed Marxist chapter” that saw elections as reformist.<sup>154</sup> The members in the group became familiar with Marxism after having classes with Karl Kessler, a card carrying member of the Communist Party USA.<sup>155</sup> Kessler had ties to the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) in the Los Angeles area and taught the committee about labor law and unionism. Half of the material in Kessler’s courses with members focused on labor organizing skills and political economy while the other half was about Leninism in relation to

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<sup>152</sup> Chávez, *Mi Raza Primero*, 93.

<sup>153</sup> The histories written on the movement heavily favor these groups in large part to the cultural nationalist rhetoric they espoused. See: Ignacio M. García, *United We Win: The Rise and Fall of La Raza Unida Party* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989).

<sup>154</sup> García, *United We Win: The Rise and Fall of La Raza Unida Party*, 143.

<sup>155</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 16, 2017.

labor unions. The group was guided by Kessler via Lenin's theories to "go beyond trade unionism" even though they were all trade workers in major unions like the Teamsters.<sup>156</sup> They began to develop an ideology that went beyond just fighting for union contracts that determined when a nickel or a dime more would be added during contract negotiations. Instead, they learned that union labor struggles should be turned into political struggles instead of just being economic in scope.

Becerra believes that Kessler set the course for the Labor Committee and later the ATM for their attempts at organizing with workers at the point of production in the factories. The group went to Kessler for any questions they had since he was a communist operating within labor unions. He taught them that they could teach workers about Marxism-Leninism. Members of the Labor Committee also went to meetings with Trotskyites but they felt that much of what they were being taught was going over their heads unlike the pragmatism of Kessler.<sup>157</sup> They did however discover two pamphlets by Marx that were written specifically for workers. Marx's *Wage-Labour and Capital* and *Value, Price and Profit* were more accessible to members of the committee who either maybe had a high school diploma or some college experience.<sup>158</sup>

Armed with the training Kessler provided along with their study of the Marxist canon the activists had the theoretical foundation they believed they needed to organize workers. Becerra recalled in a 1978 interview "many of us were, had taken up socialist views, Marxist views, and

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<sup>156</sup> Lenin believed trade unions could be a site of importance for the vanguard party to develop consciousness among the working class to organize for a revolution. He called for leftists to work within the unions to win them to the side of communism. Two of his most important writings on communists and the labor unions were: V.I. Lenin, *Left-Wing" Communism, An Infantile Disorder: A Popular Essay in Marxist Strategy and Tactics* (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1940); V.I. Lenin *What is to be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement* (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1961).

<sup>157</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 16, 2017.

<sup>158</sup> These two pamphlets by Marx are short in length but define in more accessible ways his ideas of wages, capitalist competition tied to the prices of commodities, surplus value, production, and currency. See: Karl Marx, *Wage-Labour and Capital* (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1933); Karl Marx, *Value, Price and Profit* (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1935).

we were trying to link up with the struggle of the working class. And what we did, the organization itself originally was a merger of students and workers from the trade unions, the laborers, the steelworkers, I forget, Teamster... later as it expanded, it brought in, there were more unions.”<sup>159</sup> They launched wildcat strikes and boycotts for better working conditions for ethnic Mexicans in factories and industries that began their practical experiences with organizing workers.

People began calling the group whenever they had any labor issue with their employers or unions. Many times it was immigrant Mexicans fighting for the opportunity to speak Spanish in their workplaces, or to have their unions publish materials in Spanish so that they could understand the bargaining processes. Becerra recalled about twelve different times people calling and saying “*a las tres vamos a tener huelga*” in places like the City of Industry, or in San Pedro, a vital port city that continues to be critical to manufacturing and trade in California.<sup>160</sup> Workers called to say that they were going to do wildcat strikes because their “*sindicato*,” or union, would not sanction one. The Labor Committee became an auxiliary for workers that were unhappy with their unions. They also were not afraid to organize workers that had an immigrant status—something the ATM would not lose sight of.

One of the bigger strikes the Labor Committee helped to organize occurred throughout 1972 where they dealt with the Upholsters International Union of North America’s (UIU) treatment of largely immigrant workers. The employees produced bed springs at a local factory. They called the committee around March and said “they are working us to death” after the company they were employed by purchased new machines that worked faster. Workers were not

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<sup>159</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Gerald Rosen, December 23, 1978, Chicano Students in Los Angeles [OHP 226] Center for Oral and Public History California State University, Fullerton.

<sup>160</sup> Translates to, “at three we are going to have a strike.” Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 16, 2017.



allowed to speak Spanish at union events and felt the UIU were a “*bola de vendidos*” loosely translated as a group of sell-outs. Cruz Becerra and Jimmy Franco visited the worksite one time where they witnessed workers “all dirty with grease, their faces all covered” and felt this was the “real proletariat.”<sup>161</sup> Organizing these workers had a big influence on the committee.

Members of the Labor Committee began organizing with the workers after their initial contact. They organized during the week and on Sunday mornings they studied Lenin on how to “classify workers in terms of political consciousness.”<sup>162</sup> They quickly learned that the mattress spring workers had a contract negotiation coming up around August and that it was not just one factory that required help, but rather nine manufacturers in the area had similar problems of bad working conditions and no language equality in the workplace. The committee began by setting up meetings with shop stewards from all of the plants and even recruited a few of them to become Marxist-Leninists. It was agreed, with the help of Kessler, that they would conduct roaming strikes where different occupations at the alternative factories would call out of work during a week-long process. The partial strikes were without union sanction but it taught the workers and the committee how strong their solidarity could be if a full-fledged strike was called. Everything being done inside the factory by the committee was done independent of the union because they were being called “troublemakers” by trying to help the workers.

Wages according to Becerra had been so low that new contracts in previous years would only give a penny raise here and there. The workers had not received a raise for ten years and by 1972 a wage freeze had been ordered by Richard Nixon due to the Vietnam War and the rise of inflation.<sup>163</sup> It was then suggested by Karl Kessler that since the California Federation of Labor

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<sup>161</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 16, 2017.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> For more on how Nixon’s Wage Board effected labor unions during the 1970s see: Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Lane

was having its biannual convention in Anaheim, the furniture workers could create a picket line. Through it, they would attempt to force labor leaders from the more mainstream AFL-CIO to stand up to Nixon's wage board.<sup>164</sup> This included the head of the AFL-CIO, George Meany, whom the Labor Committee considered a sell-out for not defending workers against Nixon more forcefully.<sup>165</sup>

With a plan of action ready the workers called a strike on the day of the AFL-CIO convention during lunch hours. Becerra remembers "working our asses off" for 24-hour work days to prepare leaflets and strategies for how the committee would help.<sup>166</sup> He was a part of one team that worked on a mimeograph machine to print, cut, and stack leaflets so that other teams could pick them up at 5am the next day. These teams were assigned to different factories where they would pass out the leaflets as people entered work that said there would be a walkout that day. Then right before lunchtime members of the committee at the various worksites passed out flyers prepared specifically for the bosses that said workers were "going to exercise their political rights." The committee cited section 5 of the labor code which essentially says that bosses can not interfere with the political rights of workers.<sup>167</sup> When it was time for the strike to begin the Labor Committee teams ran into the factories to have the shop stewards turn off the machines.

During lunch everybody in six out of the nine plants walked out. Becerra was not sure if everybody in the plant would walk out since many of them were undocumented but many of the workers did. Over 500 workers joined the picket line as factory after factory were arriving at the

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Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

<sup>164</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 16, 2017.

<sup>165</sup> *El Obrero*. Volume 1, No. 2, November 1972, "Strike Against Wage Board," 1, Radicalism Collection, Special Collections Michigan State University.

<sup>166</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 16, 2017.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

AFL-CIO convention in Anaheim on August 21<sup>st</sup>.<sup>168</sup> They carried signs that were anti-Nixon, anti-wage theft, and against the Wage Control Board. The workers were eventually allowed to address the convention and speeches were given in English and Spanish. The strike showed solidarity and leadership among the workers heading into their contract negotiations. George Meany was forced to address the media for not going against Nixon's Wage Board more forcefully which was considered a victory by the workers and the Labor Committee.<sup>169</sup> When the workers returned to their worksites they were happy because they "poked their bosses in the eye."<sup>170</sup> Their struggles, however, were just beginning.

During contract negotiations in August, the workers voted down a contract and decided to speak in Spanish at UIU meetings since they had no trust in their local union representatives. The workers were then locked out when it was decided by the bosses that negotiations were going nowhere.<sup>171</sup> The Labor Committee now had a full-blown strike on their hands with no union benefits for the workers. When the workers turned down the new contract they voted to strike. This strike/lockout became the first strike for the workers in 20 years. The UIU only provided "moral support" during the strike but did not allocate strike funds to their members. The UIU decided that the rank and file's demands in their contract negotiations "exceeded the guidelines laid by the Wage Control Board."<sup>172</sup>

Workers once again felt the sting of Nixon's wage freeze and felt that their top labor bureaucrats were helping the government keep wages down when inflation was reaching drastic highs. The Labor Committee also felt this was the union's "form of retaliation" against the rank

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<sup>168</sup> *El Obrero*. Volume 1, No. 2, November 1972, "Furniture Workers Win Strike," 4, Radicalism Collection, Special Collections Michigan State University.

<sup>169</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 16, 2017.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *El Obrero*. Volume 1, No. 2, November 1972, "Furniture Workers Win Strike," 4.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

and file for their one-day political strike. Workers were denied unemployment benefits after the lockout, and when they tried to collect welfare and food stamps they were forced to wait 3 weeks to a month. Only one-third of the workers were eventually deemed eligible to win welfare benefits after some time.

The Labor Committee was now taking part in a full-blown wildcat strike and lockout, with minimal union and financial support. They took it upon themselves to raise money to support the strikers because they felt they played a large part in the situation. They received support from the Latina/o community including the United Farm Workers, and also marched in a Mexican Independence Day parade on September 16 in East Los Angeles where they raised \$400 by passing buckets for donations from people watching the parade.<sup>173</sup> The workers of Local 500 marched with the LRUP contingent in the parade. They used the money to purchase loafs of bread, bags of rice, and tons of beans to pass out to the strikers. The UFW provided bobcats filled with corn and other vegetables that filled two large trucks to support the striking workers.

The Labor Committee helped to keep up the morale of workers for a total of six weeks. The strike officially ended on October 11 when the spring workers returned to work. The newly won contract called for a 78 cent increase over a three-year period.<sup>174</sup> This increase was more than the workers had won over the previous ten-year period when they were awarded an increase of 76 cents over that span. Although the Labor Committee and the workers faced countless struggles such as fighting their bosses, local union leaders, the AFL-CIO, and Nixon's Wage Board they walked away with a "shit load" of experience in trade union work as communists on

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<sup>173</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 16, 2017. See also: Labor Committee of La Raza Unida Party, Los Angeles County, *El Obrero*. Volume 1, No. 2, November 1972, 4. Radicalism Collection, Special Collections Michigan State University.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

how to carry practical work in a political strike.<sup>175</sup> Becerra and other activists learned how to build a struggle through a union by connecting issues facing workers with the theories of Lenin and Marx. The Labor Committee did have its faults in terms of their organizing but the strike did reveal to them that they were inexperienced in many ways. This, however, did not deter them from future labor organizing. These experiences began to lay the practical labor work for the ATM. They felt they were getting experience other communists did not have.

The Labor Committee reported on the strikes they were participating in within the pages of their own newspaper *El Obrero (The Worker)*.<sup>176</sup> The bilingual newspaper was where the Labor Committee conveyed updates of worker's struggles such as the political strike against the Wage Board. They also gave space to the political elections the LRUP was involved in. They situated the struggles of workers in Los Angeles and the greater Southwest area with issues of U.S. imperialism and capitalism. Articles related to worker struggles in Mexico and columns on worker histories provided readers an international scope of the struggles facing Latina/o workers in the U.S. The collective used the newspaper to reach Spanish and English speaking workers about labor history and the need for unionization in the Southwest.

The work the Labor Committee was doing with workers did not exempt them from their political work with LRUP. For example, Becerra and Franco served as representatives for the committee at a California state-wide convention on July 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1972. They co-chaired a workshop on "Labor and Deportations" where they laid out LRUP should refer to "illegal aliens" as "people without documents" and provide support for workers against employers that were

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<sup>175</sup> Labor Committee of La Raza Unida Party, Los Angeles County, *El Obrero*. Volume 1, No. 2, November 1972, 4.

<sup>176</sup> Labor Committee of La Raza Unida Party, Los Angeles County, *El Obrero*. Volume 1, No. 2, November 1972.

reporting their employees to the government.<sup>177</sup> It would be at this 1972 convention that the two men met activists from the Northern California chapters of LRUP who were also studying Marxism.

Eventually the Los Angeles Labor Committee broke away from LRUP to create the August 29<sup>th</sup> Collective because they felt electoral politics was not the route to addressing the oppression of the working class.<sup>178</sup> Instead, they continued to stress that working among workers was a better route to applying Marxism. The August 29<sup>th</sup> Collective stressed in 1973 the importance of developing a systematic study of Marxism-Leninism for helping to train Chicano workers to “organize on the job, to fight national oppression” and study Marxism-Leninism.<sup>179</sup>

The ATM Collective also developed a *Congreso Obrero* (Labor Congress) in Los Angeles in 1973 as a “mass organization of Mexicano and Chicano workers set up for the purpose of helping to train them to organize on the job, to fight national oppression and to study Marxism-Leninism.”<sup>180</sup> They taught workers along with Karl Kessler on how to organize by using labor law. Meeting halls were filled with workers seeking to learn how to operate within and beyond their trade union. They also created a *Congreso Estudiantil* (Student Congress) during this same period which had the same purpose – to help train Chicano students as organizers and to teach them Marxism-Leninism. The student congress was to help train students as organizers and to teach them Marxism-Leninism to organize their communities.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> “La Raza Unida State-Wide Convention July 1, and 2, 1972,” 4, José Angel Gutiérrez Papers, box 61, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>178</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 16, 2017.

<sup>179</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle “Statements on the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle (Marxist-Leninist),” 82.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

## **Finding Unity**

1972 served as the most important year prior to the creation of the ATM as it was the first point when activists in their various collectives began speaking to one another. Members active in La Raza Unida that were reading Marxism first came into contact with one another at the California state-wide convention on April 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> when it was agreed more conversation would begin between the chapters. Cruz Becerra attended the convention where he was amazed to discuss socialism with people who had been to Cuba and were also learning Marxism-Leninism.<sup>182</sup> At the state conference he came into contact with “badass Chicanas, theoretically sound, and taking names” from San Jose. He felt the Northern California chapters were more advanced theoretically due to the Bay Area being a site of sophisticated activism and that the area was more advanced than LA. For his part, Bill Gallegos indicated that at the 1972 San Jose conference that the Labor Committee was the most advanced chapter in California because they were actually organizing workers.<sup>183</sup>

The California chapters including the Labor Committee and Southern Alameda County helped to determine a list of resolutions at the San Jose conference before they attended the nationwide meeting later in the year. Lucia Aguilar, Cruz Becerra, and Jimmy Franco were three of the representatives present at the nationwide conference. They took with them a definition for what “La Raza” meant to California that included people from “north, south, and/or Latin America, and those individuals who feel culturally as Raza.”<sup>184</sup> They voted to “support all oppressed peoples struggles for self-determination in the world,” along with the immediate

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<sup>182</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 16, 2017.

<sup>183</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

<sup>184</sup> “Political Strategy,” José Angel Gutiérrez Papers, box 61, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.

removal of all troops from Vietnam. California viewed a relationship between the oppression of Latina/os in the U.S. and the Vietnamese.

The California resolutions also argued LRUP was not a “political party in the traditional sense,” but rather one that used the “electoral process to create political-economic change for La Raza.”<sup>185</sup> California argued LRUP should seek “equal representation and self-determination in controlling the institutions that affect our lives such as labor, housing, education, health, etc.”<sup>186</sup> The priority according to them should be to “reunite, educate, and actively involve all Raza in creating change” and to offer alternatives to the “capitalist political-economic” system found in the United States. The language found in the resolutions reflect the ideals laid out in this chapter that activists began crafting since their participation in other organizations as early as 1968. It was internationalist in scope, as they sought to include all Latin American descendent people which was representative of how California broke down racially. They also believed separate institutions outside of capitalism were required and that the imperialist war in Vietnam by the U.S. should be stopped. The delegation from California not only called out capitalism and imperialism, but they also fought for “worker’s rights, workplace democracy, and women’s equality.”<sup>187</sup> These were all themes that ran through the activists and collectives that went on to merge into the ATM.

The resolutions presented at the El Paso nationwide convention represented the left leaning aspects of LRUP that were not necessarily the majority. LRUP and one of its main leaders, José Angel Gutierréz, held negative views towards Marxism and communism as tools for organizing the Chicana/o community. Cruz Becerra felt Gutierréz did not really want to deal

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<sup>185</sup> “Political Strategy,” José Angel Gutiérrez Papers, box 61, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.



with labor issues.<sup>188</sup> Bill Gallegos echoed Becerra that Gutiérrez actually sabotaged a LRUP *Congreso* that was supposed to occur after the national convention that never got off the ground.<sup>189</sup> The *Congreso* was to be created as a body within LRUP that was supposed to give it legitimacy and space to organize around a manifesto on land, education, and worker's rights.

At one point, Gutiérrez claimed that anybody could be a student of Marx and Lenin but few could use the theory to organize a political party. He also wrote in a letter to an unknown recipient referred to as "*Hermano de Raza*" that capitalism dehumanizes people in the U.S. first before it does Puerto Ricans, Africans, and others in the world system. He asserted that if there were activists who wanted to organize internationally, or wanted to be involved in matters other than those related to Chicana/os then they should insert themselves in world matters outside of LRUP.<sup>190</sup> This became true as members of LRUP would attempt to create a new communist party.

The Labor Committee in Los Angeles and the Southern Alameda County chapter, in addition to a Labor Committee from Albuquerque, New Mexico, all felt that LRUP was becoming too constraining for them by 1973. It was decided since they were all studying Marxism that it was not "appropriate to turn LRUP into a communist organization."<sup>191</sup> Instead, they felt LRUP should maintain its autonomy while separate collectives needed to be formed. The East Bay Labor Collective, La Raza Workers Collective, and the August 29<sup>th</sup> Collective were then formed. Their communication continued after the collectives were formed. The collectives had all taken up the question of Marxism despite LRUP not being Marxist in orientation. Members of LRUP were Marxists and were doing work in the party openly but

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<sup>188</sup> Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 16, 2017.

<sup>189</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

<sup>190</sup> Letter from José Angel Gutiérrez, undated, box 61 Raza Unida Party Records, 1969-1979, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>191</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

decided to break off to form their own organization tied to the ideologies of Marxism-Leninism and communism more broadly.

The national convention in 1972 became the point where the California collectives met a group of LRUP members from Albuquerque that were also studying Marxism-Leninism and organizing workers.<sup>192</sup> The history of this group is still a bit unclear, but they were considered the most inexperienced of the four groups that went on to form the ATM. They were more active in the studying of Marxism-Leninism, but they also organized students and workers at the University of New Mexico.<sup>193</sup> Made up primarily of students, the collective had conducted small amounts of labor organizing. Yet it would become a central site for the ATM, especially after Cruz Becerra moved there to bolster the district.

Before merging to become the ATM, each collective group participated in workplace struggles that would eventually inform the ideology of the fused organization in 1974. The collectives participated in labor strikes before the ATM became an organization and continued to do so after 1974. The similar ideas of connecting the writings from the Marxist canon with organizing workers at the point of production brought the collectives to find unity with each other. It is clear from their writings that the collectives and subsequently the ATM believed they learned that they needed to organize workers to spread their ideology to become leaders of a communist revolution. They also realized the importance of providing assistance to immigrant workers that were not being organized or listened to by their major labor unions. These activists would make up the ATM which consistently maintained an approach to labor organizing that centered the equality of language, no matter a person's citizenship status. This also reflects the

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<sup>192</sup> New Mexico is normally associated with the activism of Reis Lopez Tijerina and his *La Alianza* organization to win back the lands stolen from indigenous populations due to the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo but other groups were involved such as the ATM.

<sup>193</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle "Statements on the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle (Marxist-Leninist)," 85.

racial and ethnic breakdown of the ATM that would have primarily Chicana/o members but Central American members such as the Salvadoran immigrant Oscar Rios were also key figures in the organization.

Beyond the participation in learning how to organize workers, people like Bill Gallegos, Lucia Aguilar, Cruz Becerra, and Joe Navarro began to develop anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and Third World perspectives that stemmed from both their experiences in various struggles and the reading of the Marxist canon. Participation in weekly study classes with readings by Third World revolutionaries including the carrying around of Mao's *Little Red Book* while evoking the iconography of the Cuban revolution are crucial elements for beginning to deconstruct the evolution of the ATM. Many, if not all of the members that joined the collectives that formed the ATM did not begin their activism well versed in the theories of the Marxist canon. Rather, through political study and praxis, they began to strongly consider the utility of theories of societal revolution found in the writings of Marx, Lenin, Mao, Stalin, Che, and Ho Chi Minh. Thus, the activists began to place themselves in context with other struggles going on around the world. They began to adopt the ideologies not only in the Third World but also from Europe that were deemed "foreign" by other Chicana/o activists that saw Marxism as a European ideology not applicable to the Chicana/o or Latina/o experience in the United States. They faced criticism from people who were considered key figures in the Chicana/o movement in David Sanchez from the Brown Berets and Jose Angel Gutierrez from La Raza Unida Party. This resistance from within the ranks of the Chicana/o movement reflects that the ATM and its members would be considered on the fringe of the social movement which has resulted in former activists and now historians leaving them there.

The evolution of the usage of Marxist ideologies by activists is also found in the print culture established in the other groups like La Raza Unida Party and Los Siete. *El Obrero* by the Labor committee of LRUP in Los Angeles, *La Voz* by the Southern Alameda Chapter of LRUP, and *Basta Ya* by Los Siete not only highlighted the activism of the groups but they also provided insight into new theoretical frameworks to the reader. All three political organs were bilingual and stressed the need for the equality of all languages when trying to organize. Within the newspapers were reports of the various labor and social struggles the groups participated in. Also found were reports from around the world including political happenings in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Included in these newspapers was the developing sense that the Chicana/o movement needed a working class perspective that tied the struggles of laborers under U.S. capitalism with others including African Americans, Latina/os, and Asian Americans.

The activists came to an understanding that the Chicana/o experience in the U.S. was one of oppression that was tied to other countries that were being taken advantage of by U.S. and Soviet Union imperialism. The need for cross-racial coalitions was supplemented by a desire to show how imperialism, by the U.S. and other superpowers, kept groups of people oppressed for the benefit of commodities by paying for cheap labor. The activist believed their study groups that included the readings of the Marxist canon as well as their organizing provided them with theory and praxis which allowed for them to see the need to create such coalitions. The exploitation seen by future ATM activists when participating in LRUP, the Crusade for Justice, the Brown Berets, and Los Siete began during the 1960s and would further develop with more interaction with workers and the Marxist canon after May 1974 when the group was officially formed.

## CHAPTER 2: For a “Revolutionary Cause:” The Founding Ideologies of the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement

“We must struggle for the unity of all genuine Marxist-Leninists into a new communist party which will lead the struggle for the liberation of the working class and oppressed nationalities through socialist revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat.”

-The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, *Unity Statement*.

Eric Mann’s experiences before joining the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement began as a student at Columbia University during the 1960s and led to him joining the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and later the Weatherman Underground.<sup>194</sup> He participated in the civil rights struggles for African Americans, served time in prison where he wrote a book about George Jackson, and eventually moved to Berkeley, California after meeting his future wife, Lian Hurst, while in Mexico. Hurst Mann approached Mann about possibly joining a Communist Party while they were living in Berkeley during the 1970s. She had been involved with the Berkeley-Oakland Women’s Union as a socialist feminist but began moving towards Marxism-Leninism. Mann was initially hesitant in joining a Communist Party since he had bad experiences with what he calls “racist” white communist groups.

The two ended up attending what Mann described as a “forum or a communist fair of six groups” who were each trying to recruit prospective members. They listened to members from groups including the Workers Viewpoint Organization that Mann recalls was a “very academic” presentation.<sup>195</sup> Then a woman from the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement (ATM) took the stage who captivated Mann and Hurst Mann. She was from the Southwest and said the ATM came out of La Raza Unida Party’s Labor Committee. She exclaimed, “we come out of the real world.” Mann

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<sup>194</sup> Eric Mann interview by Eddie Bonilla, May 2, 2018.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

was drawn to her rhetoric because she was talking like an organizer more than an ideologue. She brought up that the group was involved with the Chicano national question, but more importantly for Mann the woman said they were “actually in factories and getting jobs in factories,” along with the fact that they were organizing strikes while going to worker’s homes. Mann recalls saying to himself, “this sounds like me. I have organized in the Black community in Newark. I organized in CORE [Congress of Racial Equality], SDS, where I was an organizer.” According to Mann, the speaker also said, “if you are going to be a good organizer, communism can be very important to you because it is going to give you a better strategy. It is going to teach you more discipline.” This really struck Mann’s labor organizing oriented mind.

Mann and Hurst Mann both liked ATM and decided to organize a study group of about eight white people to study the different organization’s theories.<sup>196</sup> Mann stressed the race of the individuals during an interview. The fact that a primarily Chicana/o organization attracted such interest from other racial groups indicates an attractiveness to both the ATM’s theory and praxis amidst a host of countless other groups of the New Communist movement. At least five of the eight study group participants became members of the ATM after reading the “long ass polemics” and debates between the ATM and other organizations. For Mann, ATM continued to stand out because they held a “common sense communism and common sense Maoism”.

He was eventually placed into a local committee that also served as a study group. This moment was more like an internship, or like a probationary period. People would ask questions about the organization and “carry out practice” based on the things one was interested in such as labor or education struggles until you were placed into a unit that focused on one set of specific struggles. For Mann, this became the labor unit after about three or four months of studying with the local committee. Mann and Hurst Mann would go on to be key players for the ATM when

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<sup>196</sup> Eric Mann interview by Eddie Bonilla, May 2, 2018.

they began organizing in the labor industry and they would continue this activism into the League of Revolutionary Struggle when they took up fighting to keep General Motors plants in the United States during a turn to neoliberalism. Plants were moving to other parts of the world prior to this turn but Mann and Hurst Mann and other activists from the ATM and the League mobilized against the 1970s and 1980s iterations of runaway plants.

A predominantly Chicana/o organization established in May of 1974, the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement drew members from revolutionary collectives from Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New Mexico seeking radical change for workers. Members of the ATM took inspiration from the activism of the 1960s and 1970s that influenced them to attempt to become the vanguard organization for Chicana/os in the United States. They worked with university students, Latina/o communities, and workers as they drew upon a Marxist-Leninist vanguard ideology. They rigorously attempted to understand and apply the philosophies of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Tse-Tung to the struggles of self-determination for minorities. They felt they had a duty to organize the masses of oppressed people in the United States to fight the twin oppression they faced under capitalism as minorities and working class individuals. The organization would also struggle with incorporating the “woman question,” that they eventually argued showed that women faced what Trinidadian Communist Claudia Jones coined “triple oppression.” The ATM argued that Chicana/o communities faced issues surrounding race and class, which required a systematic analysis of oppression and mobilization by activists for social change but they’d struggle to place the issues of women at the center of their work until they decided to add women to their Central Committee.

This chapter explores the founding organizational statements and ideologies of the ATM. The organization formed in 1974 at a Unity Congress held in Los Angeles. Through the

Congress, the organization published a *Unity Statement* that outlined their position on key themes facing communists in the United States, including party building and the Chicano national question. The chapter also reflects how the Federal Bureau of Investigation began its investigation into the ATM just a few months after it was formed for about two years. Thus, I explore how people were recruited into the organization based on these ideals and how they joined study groups to examine the economic, political, and historic conditions facing Chicana/os in the U.S. that would inform them of what struggles they needed to take up while at the same time facing real political surveillance from agents of the nation state during the global Cold War. The make-up of the group included predominantly working class men and women, some Vietnam War veterans, and many people with high school education or some college experience.

The ATM conducted mass work such as helping workers on picket lines and creating political study groups. Their most important contribution to the time period is that they raised the political consciousness of students, workers, and community members. The organization often reflected upon their failures, successes, and connections to broader social movements. Scholars have essentially been excluded from the historiographies about the Chicana/o movement, the New Left, and the New Communist movement (NCM).

Organizations from the New Communist movement took Mao Tse-Tung's words to heart against book worshiping despite some organizations falling under a dogmatic approach to the years old texts of the Marxist canon. They also recognized a critical need for the relationship between theory and practice. During the NCM sectarianism and dogmatism ran rampant. Organizations hardened their political and international lines because they constantly attacked each other's positions based on a common literature that they utilized from the Marxist canon. Study groups, according to Laura Pulido, were extremely popular in the women's, antiwar, and



antiracist movements. The left maintained a long tradition of having study groups for the purpose of introducing people to theory and that studying clarified “larger social and economic processes” while promoting political development and fostering discipline.<sup>197</sup> Organizations like the ATM attempted to strike a balance between study and action, often times struggling to treat them both equally at different stages of their respective histories.

The theories of the ATM informed their praxis and vice versa. In a somewhat dialectical method the organization conducted their study groups to have the theories inform their practical organizing in factories and on college campuses (the focus of the next chapter). The organization primarily organized lower stratum workers which would gain them respect in NCM circles. A fundamental component of their ideological platform included believing that they needed to go to the point of production in the United States’ capitalist structure to teach and organize workers in factories, canneries, and hotel and restaurant workers. the ATM sought to recruit workers during their various labor struggles to join their study groups and sought to sway unions to the side of communism.

ATM ephemera and propaganda, as well as oral histories with former members, reveal that the organization maintained a wide agenda in regards to the struggles they were active in. By closely reading their founding documents, study guides, and study notes, I highlight their theoretical approach to their organizing. I also weave information written by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation who investigated the ATM for two years which started two months after the group formed. These sources are biased due to them reflecting the thoughts and views of the nation-state that at the time was fighting communism globally and domestically. However, they do provide an in-depth look at the structure, membership base, and locations of

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<sup>197</sup> Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press. 2006).

where the ATM operated. In many ways, policing agencies have recorded social movements better than activists themselves.

Political repression according to Edward Escobar epitomized the late 1960s and 1970s as much as political protest did. He argues, “law enforcement agencies, from the Federal Bureau of Investigation to municipal police departments attempted to limit, undermine, and even destroy the various protest movements.”<sup>198</sup> Police departments and the Bureau utilized tactics such as infiltration and disruption of organizations while gathering intelligence on the ideologies and activities of various groups. Activists before the 1960s also faced government repression depending on their citizenship status and ideological orientation.

The impact of McCarthyism on the collective consciousness of Mexican American communities remained throughout the twentieth century but especially into the 1960s and 1970s. In the name of protecting internal security against the threats of communism, Ellen Schrecker shows that thousands of people lost their jobs, went to prison, or were punished in other ways such as deportation due to the effects of McCarthyism.<sup>199</sup> The fight against communism became one of the most widespread and long standing waves of political repression in American history. The impact of McCarthyism was not limited to African American or European communists but it also included the Mexican American and Mexican left. People such as prominent Guatemalan-born activist Luisa Moreno were also caught in the web of anti-communist legislation such as the McCarron Walter Act of 1952 that governed immigration laws.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Edward J. Escobar, “The Dialectics of Repression: The Los Angeles Police Department and the Chicano Movement, 1968-1971” *The Journal of American History*, 79, Number 4, 1487.

<sup>199</sup> Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998).

<sup>200</sup> Garcilazo, “McCarthyism, Mexican Americans, and the Los Angeles Committee for Protection of the Foreign-Born, 1950-1954.”

Continuities existed between the forms of policing faced by Mexican and Mexican American's into the Chicana/o movement. While organizations shifted their ideological and practical organizing foci, new government policing tactics by local police and the FBI were also adapted. Local police departments and the FBI labeled Chicana/o movement organizations and individuals in the 1960s and 1970s as subversives. In particular, they believed parts of the Chicana/o movement were pawns of the Communist Party USA which was an attempt to discredit organizations within the community.<sup>201</sup> The Cold War era further shaped the perception of communism and communists as being alien or foreign to the U.S. While the police became more oppressive towards Chicana/os in the 1960s, Edward Escobar argues the violence and more policing only helped to further politicize folks. However, it did create a further distrust of leftist politics within the Chicana/o communities while creating uncertainty within organizations about who could possibly be police informants.

The police and the FBI used their intelligence capabilities to subvert and destroy organizations in the Chicana/o movement. The presence of police informers took its toll on Chicana/o movement organizations whether leftist oriented and even the reformist ones like La Raza Unida Party were also closely followed.<sup>202</sup> Members of organizations began suspecting one another of being an informant. This would be experienced by the ATM in New Mexico.

Not only did the Bureau investigate organizations within the Chicana/o movement but they also followed Marxist oriented groups within the New Communist movement.<sup>203</sup> The FBI and J. Edgar Hoover created the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) in 1956 to

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<sup>201</sup> See: Ernesto Chávez, *Mi Raza Primero: Nationalism Identity and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), Escobar, "The Dialectics of Repression," David Montejano, *Quixote's Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement, 1966-1981* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

<sup>202</sup> Montejano, *Quixote's Soldiers*.

<sup>203</sup> Max Elbaum argues organizations that followed a Third-World Marxist leftist orientation from the 1970s to the 1990s comprise what he calls the New Communist movement. Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London: Verso Press, 2002)

discredit the social movements being built by activists from across the political spectrum.<sup>204</sup> Some of the sections of COINTELPRO focused on what the FBI called Black extremists, the Socialist Workers Party, the New Left, and the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>205</sup> Students on college campuses involved in organizations such as the Students for Democratic Society, Black leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., Black Power organizations including the Black Panther Party, and the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) were some of the Bureau's favorite targets for surveillance and infiltration. The investigation of the CPUSA was one of the first and longest lasting. The Bureau used informants in 85 percent of cases that included over 400 informants alone within the CPUSA during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>206</sup>

Scholars have written about the COINTELPRO investigations into different groups including students, workers, and activists. After the discovery of Hoover's documents on March 8, 1971 following a burglary into an FBI office in Pennsylvania it was revealed that there were two FBI's. The public FBI Americans viewed as a protector from crime and defender of citizen's liberties, and a secret FBI that "usurped citizens' liberties, treated black citizens as if they were a danger to society, and used deception, disinformation, and violence to harass, damage, and most—most imports—silence people whole political opinions the director opposed."<sup>207</sup>

Following the break-in of the FBI office, journalists, scholars, and community members sought answers in regards to the relationships between the FBI and U.S. social movements.

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<sup>204</sup> See: Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1988); Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars Against Dissent in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 1990); Aaron J. Leonard and Conor A. Gallagher, *A Threat of the First Magnitude: FBI Counterintelligence and Infiltration From the Communist Party to the Revolutionary Union 1962-1974* (London: Repeater Books, 2018).

<sup>205</sup> Aaron J. Leonard and Conor A. Gallagher, *A Threat of the First Magnitude: FBI Counterintelligence and Infiltration From the Communist Party to the Revolutionary Union 1962-1974* (London: Repeater Books, 2018), 18.

<sup>206</sup> Leonard and Gallagher, *A Threat of the First Magnitude*, 18.

<sup>207</sup> Betty Medsger, *The Burglary: The Discovery of J. Edgar Hoover's Secret FBI* (New York: Knopf 2014), 7.

The FBI and Hoover manipulated public opinion about social movements in the United States. For example, campuses across the country such as the University of California Berkeley were viewed as a breeding ground for radicalism.<sup>208</sup> Federal officials saw the American Communist Party as the “secretive arm of a foreign enemy” whose members infiltrated government and private institution to engage in sabotage and espionage.<sup>209</sup> The Cold War intensified the fears about enemies like communists at home and abroad despite the ideals of communism being policed since the early twentieth century.

The FBI was at the heart of the McCarthy era and ran like a machine of political repression “shaping loyalty programs, criminal prosecutions, and undercover operations” that pushed the issue of communism to the center of American politics.<sup>210</sup> Congress according to Ellen Schrecker literally wrote blank checks for the FBI and there were no statutory regulations to govern their operations.<sup>211</sup> With total freedom from oversight, Hoover and Bureau leaders and agents undertook political investigations. They authorized putting people under surveillance by checking license plates parked outside political meetings. The Bureau used other tactics to keep track of people like rifling through people’s trash, intercepting mail, breaking into homes and offices, and planting illegal microphones and wiretaps in the name of domestic security. They also used informants and confidential sources who at times were volunteers for the job out of patriotism.<sup>212</sup> The Bureau helped informants to find jobs or to get out of being drafted into the Vietnam War.

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<sup>208</sup> Seth Rosenfeld, *Subversives: The FBI's War on Student Radicals, and Reagan's Rise to Power* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

<sup>209</sup> Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes*.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid*, 203.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, 206.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid*, 225.

Scholars have begun to unravel how the FBI infiltrated Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist New Communist organizations and the informants in the groups.<sup>213</sup> Most controversially, Richard Aoki, a former Black Panther Party affiliate has received attention from scholars utilizing FBI documents.<sup>214</sup> Aoki first came to the attention of the FBI in 1957 and informed on the BPP, the SWP, the Berkeley student strike, and other Asian American revolutionary organizations such as the I Wor Kuen and Wei Men Shi. Informants reported on the pro-Maoist group the Revolutionary Union which was a close affiliate along with the IWK of the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement on the National Liaison Committee.<sup>215</sup> The Revolutionary Union developed out of the SDS in Berkeley and faced infiltration from the FBI for their ideals around Marxism and Maoism.<sup>216</sup> An infiltrator of the RU has been shown to have reported on their work with the Black Workers Congress, the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers organization that developed out of the Young Lords Party, IWK, the Red Guards, and the ATM. It is important to highlight these organizations that were considered the Revolutionary Wing of the New Communist movement because they followed the ideas of Marxism-Leninism-Maoist thought.<sup>217</sup>

### **ATM's May 1974 Unity Congress**

The ATM released their *Unity Statement* at their Unity Congress in May of 1974, which details their initial positions on their role of being a vanguard, working with labor unions, and their first conceptualization of the national question. The four collectives formally merged during

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<sup>213</sup> Leonard and Gallagher, *A Threat of the First Magnitude*; Aaron J. Leonard and Conor A. Gallagher, *Heavy Radicals – The FBI's Secret War on America's Maoists: The Revolutionary Union/Revolutionary Communist Party, 1968-1980* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2014).

<sup>214</sup> Leonard and Gallagher, *A Threat of the First Magnitude*, ch. 3.

<sup>215</sup> Leonard and Gallagher, *A Threat of the First Magnitude*, chs. 6 and 8.

<sup>216</sup> Bob Avakian, *From Ike to Mao and Beyond: My Journey from Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist: A Memoir by Bob Avakian* (Chicago: Insight Press, 2006).

<sup>217</sup> The organizations were contemporaries of the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement and even helped to build the primarily Chicana/o organization into a viable group. The PRRWO and the BWC provided the ATM with leadership in 1974 and were even spoke at the founding congress of the organization.

this conference. Former National Chairman Cruz Olmeda Becerra recalls that it was “too hot” in Northern California to hold their Unity Congress, so the four collectives settled on meeting in Los Angeles. Becerra’s colloquialism of “too hot” was in reference to police being on high alert for any subversive activity in Northern California due to the Symbionese Liberation Army abducting Patricia Hearst, granddaughter of American publishing giant William Randolph Hearst, from the University of California, Berkeley. Joe Navarro, another former member, remembers that a community center was rented in Los Angeles so that the political discussions and debates in regards to what would be published in the new organization’s Unity Statement could be hashed out.

Organizations and activists from various movements, including nationalist and communist oriented ones, contributed to the founding of the ATM. Richie Perez, a prominent member of the Puerto Rican Young Lords Organization in New York, delivered a solidarity statement at the event as the organization was moving towards Marxism. He gave this statement as the keynote address at the founding congress. Bill Gallegos, who would go on to be a member of the ATM’s National Secretariat, remembers the four collectives had contact with the Black Workers Congress (BWC) and the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization (PRRWO) which Perez helped to found after the New York Young Lords became Marxist-Leninists. The BWC came out of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in Detroit and the PRRWO formed in New York, but both organizations lined up with Mao’s Communist China instead of the Soviet Union. This was also the case with the ATM and represented a broader trend by communists of color that looked more to China and Cuba as ideological influences. The ATM sought advice from both BWC and PRRWO in regards to the national question and how the organization should establish its infrastructure, politics, and strategy.

Both organizations were invited by the ATM to be a part of the program held at the ATM's "coming out party" at a hotel room in Los Angeles near the famous Pantry Diner in downtown on Figueroa Street. "It was packed, standing room only," Gallegos reminisced. Activists from all three groups knew they needed security for the event, especially if rival organizations attempted to disrupt the founding meeting. The event took place in the summertime and it was "hot as hell," but this did not prevent Gallegos and a few other people from wearing overcoats with shotguns underneath. Gallegos recalls wearing a bullet-proof vest that was "heavy as hell" that caused him to sweat "like crazy" as they stood on the stage and at the doors. It is within this context that the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement was formed and presented itself to other social movement organizations of the Chicana/o and New Communist movements.

Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation noted the ATM's connections with the PRRWO and the BWC quickly after they began their investigation into the organization in July, 1974. They analyzed how the Black Workers Congress, which split from the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, and the PRRWO handled part of the programs of subsequent ATM Forums in Oakland, Los Angeles, and New Mexico during August and September, 1974 after the Unity Congress. The three organizations worked together for some time in 1974 in the National Continuations Committee, which attempted to create a new Communist Party.<sup>218</sup> At the 1974 forums, the PRRWO spoke on the "National Liberation Struggle of Puerto Rico, the Role of Puerto Ricans in the Class Struggle, and Party Building."<sup>219</sup> The BWC talked about the "National and Class Question and its Relation to Party Building."<sup>220</sup> This indicates that the ATM

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<sup>218</sup> "AUGUST TWENTYNINTHMOVEMENT," JULY 20, 1976, 25, box 1, folder 27, Ernesto Chavez Collection of Chicano Movement FBI Records, 146, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>219</sup> "AUGUST TWENTYNINTHMOVEMENT," JULY 20, 1976, 25, box 1, folder 27, Ernesto Chavez Collection of Chicano Movement FBI Records, 146, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles. Use Ibid here.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.



quickly began building connections with other racial and ethnic organizations and activists in order to build a new multinational communist party. Informants advised FBI agents about meetings between the groups. An October 1975 solidarity meeting between the ATM and PRRWO took place to discuss how the organizations were united on their ideas of armed insurrection against the United States.

The ATM's *Unity Statement* reflects this early close working relationship with the PRRWO and the BWC. It begins with a remark that they realized this was only a beginning statement on the "burning questions of today especially, the building of a communist party of a new type."<sup>221</sup> On the Chicano national question they state their position is that, "within the southwest is that there has been an insufficient amount of scientific research and investigation into the question of whether Chicanos within the Southwest region constitute an oppressed nation or an oppressed national minority."<sup>222</sup> They argued the national question in essence was the final analysis of the class question of proletarian revolution within the U.S. Only a few pages are dedicated to the question but they do acknowledge that the "Marxist-Leninist theory on the national question as developed by Comrades Lenin and Stalin be our guide in our investigation of this most vital question laid down by Comrade Stalin who was the greatest innovator and Marxist-Leninist theoretician of the National Question."<sup>223</sup> *Fan the Flames: A Revolutionary Position on the Chicano National Question* written in 1976 expands on the ATM's position surrounding the Chicano in America, especially in the Southwest, as an internal colony known as Aztlán.<sup>224</sup> They believed Chicanos satisfied Stalin's five criteria for nationhood conditionally giving the right of self-determination stemming from the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of

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<sup>221</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, *Unity Statement*, 2.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>224</sup> This receives heavy discussion in chapter 4. August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, *Fan the Flames: A Revolutionary Position on the Chicano National Question*.

1848.<sup>225</sup> The organization disagreed with other Marxist and nationalist organizations on the Chicano national question. They believed the Southwest portion of the United States should take up arms and create its own nation separate from the U.S.

The ATM also took stances on their tasks of creating a new Communist Party and on the role of the communists needing to work within labor unions. They wrote, “We feel that the central and most urgent task of Marxist-Leninists is the formation of a multi-national Communist Party.” They go on to agree with Lenin, “The role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a Party that is guided by the most advanced theory.”<sup>226</sup> Their claims written by members of the ATM in 1974 state their first goal would be to create a new multi-national Communist Party to spread theory as a vanguard. The party, according to members of the ATM, would be the highest form of class organization of the proletariat but required working within other organizations such as trade unions. They go on to pose that the party would be an “instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat.”<sup>227</sup> These statements would be a recurring position for the ATM, as they would attempt to organize workers while trying to teach them Marxist literature and being the lead organization of the working class.

Labor union activism occupied a key theoretical position for the ATM. They argued that the central task of all Marxist-Leninists was to build a union of the working class into a multi-national Communist Party. They argued that trade unions are the basic and broadest forms of organization of the working class and are a “training ground of the proletariat, the area where

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<sup>225</sup> Stalin’s five criteria for nationhood included having in common a single history, language, culture, territory, and economy. According to Gil Gonzalez both Chicanos and African Americans did not satisfy all five criteria needed for nationhood. See Gilbert G. Gonzalez, “A Critique of the Internal Colonial Model.” *Latin America Perspectives* 1, no. 1 (1974): 154-161.

<sup>226</sup> See: The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, “Unity Statement,” 9, and V.I. Lenin *What is to be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement* (New York: International Publishers, 2005).

<sup>227</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, “Unity Statement,” 10.

they learn organized methods of struggle in the fight against the bourgeoisie.”<sup>228</sup> They clearly agreed with Lenin’s stance on unions summarized in his text *What is to be Done* that communists must refuse unions, but also be able to lead, and win spheres from the bourgeoisie and more largely the political right.<sup>229</sup>

The basis for work in the trade unions for the ATM was to win the “advanced workers over to the side of communism and recruiting them” into their organization, and later into the new Communist Party.<sup>230</sup> Members of the ATM believed they needed to win over workers away from right leaning trade unions to favor a leftist stance. They also argued promoting women to positions of leadership would build the battles against problems facing women on the job strike. Scholar Laura Pulido claims the ATM was one of the most conscious organizations regarding the role of women in the revolution, but their ephemera shows their position on the “Woman Question” also developed during their political life.<sup>231</sup>

The two political tasks central to the ATM right after the founding of the groups were building communist nuclei’s within workplace settings, and winning the masses of workers to socialist revolution. The unions led by the ATM would fight for democracy within unions, special demands for minorities and women, better working conditions, and would build support for other important class struggles.<sup>232</sup> Their *Unity Statement* serves as an opening for understanding how all of their political activism was informed by the concept of party building. It became a foundational text that members of the group constantly read in their study groups along with core texts from the Marxist canon. These study groups, along with actual political organizing, were the backbone of the organization.

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<sup>228</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, “Unity Statement,” 18.

<sup>229</sup> Lenin, *What is to be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement*

<sup>230</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, “Unity Statement,” 21.

<sup>231</sup> Pulido, *Black Brown Yellow & Left*.

<sup>232</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, *Unity Statement*, 31.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation began their investigation into the ATM around the same time the group held their Unity Congress. It is clear the government categorized the ATM as an extremist threat to the social order. The Secret Agent in Charge (SAC) of the San Francisco branch of the FBI sent a memo on November 29, 1974, to Clarence Kelley, the director of the FBI at the time, stating that the ATM could be active in violating Title 13, USC, Section 2383, or in other words participation in rebellion or insurrection. These early investigations into the organization led to heavier surveillance. Investigative techniques utilized by the Bureau prior to 1976 did not exceed FBI guidelines. Agents regularly reviewed the ATM's newspaper and other publications. They used informants who often provided the materials and information regarding the ATM. They began live coverage of the ATM prior to 1976 by using photographic surveillance, but there was no mail coverage or electronic surveillance anticipated. FBI reports as stated in 1976 were to be submitted semiannually on the ATM but these did not occur due to the Attorney General deciding later in the year to seize the surveillance of the group. For two years the FBI agency utilized its resources to investigate the aims and purposes of the ATM. Reports were intended to be on leaders and members to determine the need for further investigation.

The FBI labeled the ATM to be of extremist matter (EM) and as threats to internal security (IS). They were categorized under the FBI's surveillance program "Spanish-American" which was a label used on all memos during the investigation along with EM and IS. The FBI's SAC in San Francisco claimed the basis for their investigation of the ATM included their use of force and the organization's attempts to build a "New Communist Party."<sup>233</sup> In a fifteen-page FBI document, the agent wrote, "The ATM publicly states in its meetings and through propaganda that its aim is the overthrow of the present Government of the United States and

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<sup>233</sup> "AUGUST TWENTYNINTHMOVEMENT," JULY 20, 1976, 14, box 1, folder 27, Ernesto Chavez Collection of Chicano Movement FBI Records, 146, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles.

putting in place a proletariat dictatorship, to be followed by socialism and ultimately a classless communist society.”<sup>234</sup> Inspired by the Cuban Revolution and the Black Panther Party, the ATM took a position on bearing arms for an armed revolution.

Agents decided to investigate the group predicated on information that its activities could also be in violation of Sections 2383, 2384, and 2385. Agents of the FBI argued the ATM could be involved in violations of title 18, US code sections 2383 and 2384 which covered rebellion or insurrection and seditious conspiracy. They also believed they were in violation of section 2385 for advocating the overthrow of the government. FBI records reveal many of the internal workings of the organization not provided in the archival documents or interviews with former members. They used ATM documents such as one titled “Party Building” and others collected from local bookstores to examine how the ATM sought to create a multinational communist party. Special agents focused on how ATM members adopted in May 1974 their position that the “central and most urgent task of Marxist-Leninists is the formation of a multi-national Communist Party.”<sup>235</sup> They utilized the rhetoric espoused by the ATM to build their investigation and kept tabs on ATM forums, meetings, and even the locations of where ATM propaganda was published.

FBI agents summarized the purposes of the ATM’s activities as an attempt to build a new Communist Party believed to consist of “working in the factories and in unions to form Factory Nuclei and Union Fractions.” They understood that the ATM carried out its propaganda and agitation within the unions. Agents worried that the formation of Marxist-Leninist study groups by the ATM could agitate and lead workers in their demands and struggles for the overthrow of

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<sup>234</sup> “AUGUST TWENTYNINTHMOVEMENT,” JULY 20, 1976, 14.

<sup>235</sup> “AUGUST TWENTYNINTHMOVEMENT,” November 29, 1974, 1, box 1, folder 27, Ernesto Chavez Collection of Chicano Movement FBI Records, 146, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles.

the bourgeoisie. After creating study groups within the unions, the ATM believed that the seizure of state power by the proletariat would ready workers to create a new Communist Party.

### **Organizational Structure and Study Groups**

Former ATM member Eric Mann recalls receiving a phone call after having attended a panel in Berkeley, CA of New Communist movement groups around 1974.<sup>236</sup> At the panel he and his future wife Lian Hurst decided that they felt closer to the labor organizing experience and less dogmatic approach of the ATM. He believed that the ATM was being more active in the factories and workplace struggles than other groups that were also present at the panel in Berkeley. During the New Communist movement being dogmatic was used as a term to denote those that were only in their classrooms reading the theories of the Marxist canon and not applying them to organizing communities. Mann initially could not figure out what the message actually meant when he received a phone call and the person on the other line said, “yeah, that thing, that thing from the other day, you are in.” Mann deciphered after a few minutes of confusion that it was a representative from the ATM indicating to him that he was going to be placed into an ATM study group where he would be screened to see if he could transition to full member status. This sort of secrecy and screening personified the ATM and it influenced the sort of recruitment tactics they could use. Code names and/or initials were used in internal documents to attempt to protect the identities of members for fear of reprisal from the FBI.

The ATM took their study classes rigorously and integrated them into every aspect of their organizational structure and political work. FBI agents closely kept tabs on the ATM’s teaching of Marxism and communism in study classes with members and labor union workers. Agents discovered the organizational structure of the ATM as well as other internal dynamics such as leaders and branch offices. They uncovered that the ATM maintained about 70 members

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<sup>236</sup> Eric Mann Interview by Eddie Bonilla, May 2, 2018.

by using informants and realized the organization was significantly clandestine that made it hard for special agents to gather information. Although the FBI counted about 70 official members in the ATM, oral histories with former activists indicate that this did not include the hundreds of people they had in their classes. People such as Eric Mann were held on a probationary period in the study groups until they were deemed ready to become official members. For some activists they were in a formal study group for longer than a year until they finally became official members and not just sympathizers. This meant that they were not official members and did not count towards the FBI's total number. Membership in the organization ranged chapter by chapter which some were significantly bigger than others. Many more existed as cadre, or probationary members, that were involved in study groups. Former members stress that these cadre or ATM sympathizers numbered anywhere from 200 to 300 people that participated in study groups.

The organization spanned from California to New Mexico, and even a chapter in Texas. Membership, according to the FBI, included approximately twenty-one members in the Los Angeles section, which was comprised of two units in Los Angeles and one in Oxnard. Eleven members were attributed to the East Bay section that had one unit, and approximately six members in the San Francisco section that had two units. Lastly, the Albuquerque, New Mexico, section of the group consisted of three units with eleven members. This included three members in an El Paso, Texas unit. Additional units according to the FBI were found in San Jose, California with five members, Salinas, California with approximately six members, and Orange County, California with ten members.

Different FBI branch offices from across the country tracked the chapters of the ATM, but were mostly concentrated in California (San Francisco, Los Angeles, Oxnard, Oakland) as well as El Paso, Texas. Member's employments within trade unions, publishing houses, and

other locations for ATM activities were also closely monitored. Throughout 1974, the FBI consistently checked the records of ATM members to see their political party affiliations. Three of the members were registered to La Raza Unida Party, while a fourth member was registered as a Democrat in San Francisco. Records from the California Department of Motor Vehicles in Sacramento showed that one member held a California drivers license that revealed where the male member resided.<sup>237</sup>

Special agents also reported on the organizational structure of the ATM. The highest body within the organization was ATM Congress; it elected members to the Central Committee which became the highest body when the Congress was not in session. The Central Committee exerted leadership and pointed out the “principal task facing the organization.” It consisted of a chairman and approximately six other members that appointed the National Secretariat members. Located in Los Angeles, the National Secretariat carried out the day-to-day work of the organization and the decisions of the Central Committee. They made sure ATM members correctly implemented the political line of the organization and that the organizational principle of democratic centralism was correctly utilized. Following the higher bodies were the district committees, section committees, units, factory nuclei, trade union fractions, and external political education study groups.

Bill Gallegos recalls National Secretariat meetings in his apartment in Pasadena, California, which included him, James “Jimmy” Franco, and Cruz Becerra along with two other members, including one woman. They had security measures, including parking their cars blocks away from his apartment to not attract any attention. Upon parking and walking to his apartment they would carry their study books in grocery bags. Gallegos was eventually kicked out of this apartment by his landlord because “Sometimes our meetings got contentious and we got loud.”

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<sup>237</sup> “AUGUST TWENTYNINTHMOVEMENT,” JULY 20, 1976, 7.



He was even asked by the landlord if he was a drug dealer. This highlights two key things about the group. First, that the fear of FBI surveillance in many ways caused them to act more suspicious despite thinking they were being “so slick hiding from the state.”<sup>238</sup> This suspicion has personified these activists until the present. Second, the fact that the organization was holding their National Secretariat meetings at Gallegos’ apartment reveals a determination to build a communist revolution out of their own homes. The National Secretariat also shows that the highest body in the ATM was also expected to keep a close reading of Marxist texts.

The ATM formed study groups led by the unit leaders and consisted of prospective members. These study groups served as a screening process to determine who could become a full member. The FBI was able to learn that ATM members attempted to recruit trade union workers, students, and community members into study groups that have been shown were focused on reading the Marxist canon, including the works of Lenin, Mao, Marx, Che, and other revolutionary writers.<sup>239</sup> Bureau agents discovered these internal dynamics of the ATM through their various tactics of reading ATM documents acquired from informants.

Many of the eventual members of the ATM began their work in study groups that were utilized for learning and applying the theoretical writings of the Marxist canon. As had occurred with Eric Mann, potential members joined the groups in a form of probationary period so that the organization could determine what type of activism the cadre would participate in. For some people this membership in study groups lasted up to two years without ever becoming a full fledged member. For others, like Mann, they moved quickly through the group and joined units such as one focused on labor.

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<sup>238</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

<sup>239</sup> “AUGUST TWENTYNINTHMOVEMENT,” JULY 20, 1976, 11.

The ATM, for example, recruited individuals to join classes that examined political economy, the national question, and the woman question. Study groups were found across the various districts of the ATM including Los Angeles, Oxnard, Salinas, San Francisco, Denver, and New Mexico. Members within the ATM recruited prospective people for study groups in a host of settings including on picket lines during labor struggles or on college campuses. These were two of the most popular ways people were recruited. Bill Gallegos remembers approaching people for study groups and determining whether they would be appropriate for joining.<sup>240</sup> For Theresa Montaño, the “beauty” of the study groups was that members could raise questions and they did not feel like a class.<sup>241</sup> Instead, it was understood that this was what the organization was building when talking about the power of working people being very real to be able to create meaningful changes to the power structures at be. The study groups were also not only about studying and reading but also about support. Talks revolved around the readings but also the practical work and experiences of the members in the organization.

ATM members had experience with policing agencies and were aware of being watched by policing agencies. They were especially attentive since many of them were active in the Brown Berets and La Raza Unida Party which the FBI tracked as well.<sup>242</sup> The organization took lengthy measures to screen potential prospective members into study groups and eventually into becoming full members out of fear of infiltration. This is why many were expected to be in a study group for a lengthy period of time before they could join.

The education of most members entering the ATM study groups was not from the intelligentsia but rather the bulk were from people from poor or working class backgrounds with maybe a high school education. Bill Gallegos recalls, “Folks without a great education came

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<sup>240</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

<sup>241</sup> Theresa Montaño interview by Eddie Bonilla, August 22, 2018.

<sup>242</sup> For more see chapter 1.

prepared and they would bring questions.”<sup>243</sup> He remembers the first time he read Lenin’s *What is to be Done* and saying, “Fuck! I am never going to be a Marxist. I said I don’t know what the hell they are talking about.” This, however, did not deter Gallegos but instead stressed the importance of collectively struggling together to break down the complex topics. He remembers workers having mostly positive reactions to the groups.

Roberto “Beto” Flores who was organizing in Salinas, California met a married couple when he was working with the children of farmworkers when he was asked if he wanted to join a study group along with his wife to study Marxism.<sup>244</sup> He remembers reading “anti-Trotsky stuff,” in other words Marxist-Leninist literature. The study group held a “pretty strict Stalinist line” and they were in denial of the atrocities he had committed, according to Flores. He was recruited into the East Bay Labor Collective portion of the ATM that came out of the Los Siete organization. The group eventually moved to Oxnard, California where they stayed and built a new district for the ATM. Flores would go on to become a key organizer for the ATM by serving on its Central Committee and would have never joined had it not been for being recruited into a study group while organizing in Salinas.

For Ed Gallegos, Bill Gallegos’ brother, he started his affiliation with the ATM via a study group in Denver, Colorado that actually studied with a collective from New Mexico.<sup>245</sup> Activists from Albuquerque visited Denver about once a month to study Marx and political economy in a structured study group session. It was not a “book club” but instead was meant to teach individuals about broad topics related to Chicana/os. Gallegos, who self describes as “not a very smart guy,” held a high school diploma but found himself most struck by the ATM’s analysis of imperialism. He remembers also going every so often to New Mexico for weekend

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<sup>243</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

<sup>244</sup> Beto Flores interview by Eddie Bonilla, August 14, 2017.

<sup>245</sup> Ed Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, February 19, 2018.

workshops on political economy or on the national question by studying the writings of Stalin and Harry Haywood, a prominent African American member of the Communist Party USA who wrote on the “Negro Question.” During these study groups Gallegos was going to trade school and working two jobs after he quit being a musician in 1974.

Former ATM member Theresa Montaña moved towards the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement after transferring to the California State University of Los Angeles (CSULA) from East Los Angeles Community College during the mid-1970s.<sup>246</sup> At CSULA, she recalls three groups being most prominent including the Communist League, El Centro de Acción Social Autónomo, and the ATM. The ATM’s discussion of the national question and their approach to the woman question caught her attention most after toying with the other groups and starting a study group with the Communist League. Montaña claims Marxism hit her early on from her experiences being raised in South Central Los Angeles. The ATM was more grounded in activism according to Montaña while the other groups were more theoretical. ATM also gave her the opportunity to remain a Chicano nationalist along with her working class politics. For Montaña she saw the “Marxists of color” in the ATM that were working with other left groups of color.

She recalls, “not being at a loss” for someone trying to recruit oneself into an organization. She started going to ATM events and even dating someone in ATM before joining the organization. Her partner did “very little even though we were in a relationship” to recruit her.<sup>247</sup> One aspect Montaña believes was important was that mainly the women would sit down, have coffee, and talk before even trying to recruit someone into a study group. Developing relationships was key for the organization. Montaña even at one point recruited a woman who

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<sup>246</sup> Theresa Montaña interview by Eddie Bonilla, August 22, 2018.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

would eventually become her *comadre*.<sup>248</sup> She claims they were conscious that “whoever we recruited there was a friendship as well.” Even if someone chose not to join the organization it did not mean the friendship would be severed.

Montaño recalls receiving the readings about a week before a study group meeting and then coming together to discuss the topic for the week. It was “real complex” and difficult to understand but she remembers having study group leaders that broke down the material.<sup>249</sup> In particular, she remembers a “stone working class,” not intellectual activist breaking down the most complex readings during her study sessions. She remembers others like Bill Gallegos being “brilliant” but maintaining a “much more intellectual discourse” that still drives her crazy because he could not break down the readings for “normal people.”

*What is to be Done* by Lenin was one of the most important text for members of the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement. Former Chairman of the ATM, Cruz Becerra, recalls reading the book in the study groups while Eric Mann remembers working full shifts at a hospital to only get home and read the book. Other writings by Lenin read by the group included *Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, *State or Revolution*, and *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Becerra remembers the *Left Wing Communism* text addressing issues the ATM was confronted with.<sup>250</sup> Other documents that were read included Fidel Castro’s “Second Declaration of Havana” and even films like the 1954 *Salt of the Earth* starring Mexican American Communist Juan Chacon for study purposes.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> The literal translation is co-mother. It represents a close relationship people build via baptizing someone else’s child. On other levels it indicates a close knit, almost kin-like, relationship between two people or between couples.

<sup>249</sup> Theresa Montaño interview by Eddie Bonilla, August 22, 2018.

<sup>250</sup> Cruz Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 14, 2017.

<sup>251</sup> Fidel Castro in the Second Declaration of Havana asserted the rights of the peoples of the Americas to sovereignty and independence.

Literature in the study groups appeared in both English and Spanish so that all could do the readings.<sup>252</sup> The reading lists would be sent out prior to meetings along with materials. Most of the materials came from the “ton of Marxist based bookstores throughout California,” and whatever they could not get in Spanish they would obtain from Mexico. ATM members would then put the materials on tape so that “Mexicanos would listen to it and then have a discussion.”<sup>253</sup>

Topics covered by the ATM in their study groups ranged from history based studies of capitalism and imperialism to more specific arguments found in the books of the Marxist canon. For example, they utilized Lenin’s *What is to be Done* to approach questions such as “What is class consciousness?” They also asked what was the “relationship of working class to other classes and strata” and the role of Communists in training the “working class in class consciousness” by giving leadership to those classes. In a sheet of guided questions for a study session on chapters 1-3 of *What is to be Done* they also examined what the role of the working class, newspapers, and political agitation would be for creating a societal revolution. Chapter 5 of *What is to be Done* provided the ATM with reflections about how a newspaper would be critical for creating political agitation and needed to be regularly distributed. In a broader sense, when reading *What is to be Done*, the ATM asked themselves “Why must we teach the class to hate capitalism.”<sup>254</sup>

Other topics analyzed in the study groups included different components of how to create a revolution. Meetings took place to discuss topics including on the bourgeoisie, production, and

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<sup>252</sup> Joe Navarro interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 3, 2017.

<sup>253</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

<sup>254</sup> Lenin’s writings served as an organizers guide to working within trade-unions and provided an approach for organizing a revolutionary party. Major topics included in the text which remained vital to the political and ideological orientation of the ATM and its members included how to fight dogmatism, trade-unionist politics, and the role of political newspapers.

historical materialism to understand the historical and contemporary context of the conditions facing how the ATM would organize.<sup>255</sup> By using Stalin's writings on dialectical and historical materialism they analyzed how to use the dialectical method. Mao's writings on contradiction also further pushed their utilization of dialectics while also teaching them about how to use theory with practice as discussed in Mao's *On Practice*.<sup>256</sup> Found in the study guide for the session on historical materialism and dialectical materialism were core texts by Friedrich Engels including his work on the family, Lenin's work on the state, and both Stalin and Lenin's writings on party building.<sup>257</sup> Historical and dialectical materialism for communists served as a "scientific analysis of history of the development of class struggle."<sup>258</sup> The Marxist materialist interpretation of history and historical epochs informed how ATM members viewed the "proletariat, bourgeois, and the historical oppression of women." Other writings by Marx included his work on *Wage Labor and Capital*.

The ATM's study groups were not without critique. Upon successfully recruiting individuals from picket lines or college campuses, the ATM began reading such books with them in a group setting. People such as Arturo Diaz, a librarian in Southern California, joined the ATM's study group in Orange County, California from 1974-1977 when he was asking questions of different organizations and their polemics.<sup>259</sup> He attended reading groups, public forums, and discussions with the organization but ultimately decided not to join the group. Diaz was

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<sup>255</sup> "Teaching Notes: Mann, Lian Hurst 'Fundamental Forces of Production- Relationship of Production'" Eric Mann and Lian Hurst Mann Papers, 1967-2007. MS 657, Series 3 box 15 Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA.

<sup>256</sup> "Teaching Notes: Mann, Lian Hurst 'The Particularity of Contradiction'" Eric Mann and Lian Hurst Mann Papers, 1967-2007. MS 657, Series 3 box 15 Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA.

<sup>257</sup> "Teaching Notes: Mann, Lian Hurst 'Joseph Stalin, Dialectical and Historical Materialism'" Eric Mann and Lian Hurst Mann Papers, 1967-2007. MS 657, Series 3 box 15 Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Arturo Diaz interview by Eddie Bonilla, February 28, 2018.

interested in Latina/o and Chicana/o struggles while doing readings about the U.S.-Mexico border and the question of the southwest being a nation within a nation. His major critiques of the movement and of the ATM are that they maintained a sense of religious closeness to the texts written by Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao. His assessment from the readings was that groups like ATM were populated by minorities, Maoists, and Leninists that were very nationalist. He read Marx, Lenin, and Mao and became interested in the organizations because they had come out of *el movimiento* which he did not really like the nationalist organizations that were “more narrow.” The practice of criticism, self-criticism, and reading out of a book from Mao led Diaz to relate the meetings to “evangelicals” because of the book worshiping they did.

Like most organizations of the New Communist movement the ATM romanticized the texts written by Marxists and communists. For example, Diaz recalls being in an ATM meeting where people were citing stuff from the Third International of the Soviet Union from 1931.<sup>260</sup> People quoted as if the texts were the bible, according to Diaz. For Diaz, the entire movement was too dogmatic and out of touch with current conditions. They drew from texts which came from the early part of the Russian Revolution and were produced under tsarist and tyrannical regimes. Diaz recalls the clandestine nature of the ATM was meant to emulate the conditions under which Lenin wrote some of his major works and the same for Mao and China. Cruz Becerra remembers acknowledging the different circumstances of when Lenin wrote such books as *What is to Be Done* and *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism* while in exile or while avoiding secret police.<sup>261</sup> Beto Flores claims he “always thought Marx wrote in his time, given his conditions,” and that the Chicano in the U.S. had their own conditions they had to deal with.

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<sup>260</sup> Arturo Diaz interview by Eddie Bonilla, February 28, 2018.

<sup>261</sup> Cruz Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 14, 2017.



He recalls calling Marx “just a human being” to the leader of his study group who responded that Flores “had it all wrong” by countering that “These were great thinkers.”<sup>262</sup>

Diaz’s story underscores how not everybody who came into contact with the ATM joined the group. Instead, some people were turned off by their approach to older texts written in different contexts such as in Europe. Bill Gallegos acknowledges that they did not know how to integrate the intelligentsia class such as Diaz who was a librarian or professors at universities that were also in these study classes with the organization. This, however, does reveal a close connection by these activists to universities in the 1970s and with people who would go on to write articles and books related to themes and topics addressed in the ATM classes. For many in the Chicana/o movement they were turned off from Marxist literature because it was white, European, and foreign from the Chicana/o and Latina/o communities. However, this did not deter the ATM from bringing these readings and study groups to the factories, unions, and college campuses they sought to gain influence over in the name of party building. Many people did choose to join the ATM study groups and stuck with the organizations on the basis of the theoretical study and writings the group had related to Chicana/os. The organization would have trouble at times with balancing their studying and their organizing but both realms of their activism, the theory and praxis, informed the other.

The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement maintained a consistent print culture through their biweekly and bilingual newspaper *Revolutionary Cause* and also printed a theoretical journal the *Red Banner* in tandem with leaflets and flyers. FBI special agents gathered through surveillance where the ATM produced and sold documents. A location known as La Raza House served as the home of many members who ran off “large numbers of various ATM documents there and

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<sup>262</sup> Beto Flores interview by Eddie Bonilla, August 14, 2017.

engaged in other activities.”<sup>263</sup> Large numbers of ATM functions occurred at 2029 and 2033 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Oakland. Telephone directories in Oakland showed to the FBI the telephone numbers of members perhaps for future use. FBI agents listened to at least one call via telephone that furnished information such as where ATM would hold forums in Los Angeles, Oakland, and New Mexico during August and September, 1974. Informants also provided propaganda and information of where members lived. One informant in 1974 provided special agents with “abandoned” materials including documents titled “Party Building,” “Unity Statement of the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement,” “Report on National Situation,” and “International Situation” that were believed to have been printed out of La Raza House.

According to documents, members sold ATM publications at a charge. Ads found within the ATM’s political organ the *Revolutionary Cause* show that prices ranged from twenty-five cents to a dollar fifty for several publications. Subscription rates for *Revolutionary Cause* were \$3.00 per year for domestic addresses or \$4.00 for outside of the US. Requests for \$20 donations could be found within the pages of the *Revolutionary Cause*. With a donation of twenty or more dollars the donator would receive a subscription to the newspaper as well as all of the ATM’s pamphlets and printed materials as they were published. The donations could be sent to a Los Angeles P.O. Box. The ATM also collected monthly dues from members and would hold occasional fundraisers. Small donation charges occurred at various public meetings such as ATM forums.

The ATM took up measures to avoid being watched by the U.S. nation state but were unsuccessful as shown by agents of the FBI watching the organization for over two years. In many ways their secrecy tactics kept prospective members such as Arturo Diaz weary of joining such a group. However, this did not deter these activists from meeting in their homes such as La

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<sup>263</sup> “AUGUST TWENTYNINTHMOVEMENT,” JULY 20, 1976, 7.

Raza House or Gallegos' apartment for the sake of strategizing how to move a revolution forward. This secrecy did hinder the organization, at the same time that it became difficult for activists to know who was an infiltrator and who was not. Despite these challenges, the group continued forward in their study and work but they did suffer losing a whole district due to what has been chalked up to FBI infiltration.

### **Secrecy and the FBI's Influence**

The FBI knew they could utilize one of their favorite tactics of infiltrating organizations and pushing agendas versus the ATM that could lead to in-fighting or create schisms. A major example of this occurred in Albuquerque where the ATM had a strong chapter. New Mexico had become a prime location for the ATM who sought to work among land grant struggles in the state. Prominent Chicana activist and writer Betita Martinez claims the overall attitude in New Mexico towards socialism or communism was not negative.<sup>264</sup> According to Martinez the only Marxist-Leninist formation to attract serious interest in the state was the ATM. However, the interactions between the ATM and Martinez would be rocky.

Betita Martinez moved to New Mexico after having organized within the black Civil Rights movement. She, along with Maria Varela began the newspaper *El Grito del Norte* that provided an internationalist and feminist perspective of the struggles occurring in New Mexico especially for land grants led by Reis Lopez Tijerina. When Martinez had to leave the state for a month or two to deal with her ailing father she found that the ATM had taken over the Chicano Communications Center that had been built.<sup>265</sup> She claims, as have various others, that two projects had been destroyed including the second printing of the bilingual book *450 years of Chicano History in Pictures* that later became *500 years*. She learned that the second printing had

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<sup>264</sup> Elizabeth (Betita) Martinez, "A View From New Mexico: Recollections of the Movimiento Left" *Monthly Review* 54, no. 3 (July, 2002).

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

been shredded on command by the ATM because the book did not take a position on Soviet social imperialism or the Chicano national question. Not only was the book destroyed, but Betita faced attacks from ATM affiliates that called her a bourgeois feminist. She felt ATM members destroyed all that had been built in Albuquerque based on their sectarian ideas.

The events in New Mexico related to the ATM led Betita to move to the Bay Area where she met with groups in Oakland that included representatives of the ATM. She recalls hearing from ATM reps that they believed among the people in the ATM movement in Albuquerque there was an informant. This led Betita to the conclusion that perhaps there were actually two people who she had an idea about that could have been agents. It was not beyond the FBI to utilize a tactic such as disrupting the publication of the book or attacking Betita who concluded this made sense especially considering the time period. When reflecting on the time Martinez evokes “that kind of thing was going on in those years, late ‘60s, early ‘70s. And all the different movements, including the movements of color, were being undermined, attacked, or attempted to be destroyed by government forces.”<sup>266</sup>

The example provided in New Mexico dealing with the ATM and the Chicana/o movement there was meant to “completely undermine, derail, or whatever you want to call it, the efforts of the Chicano Communications Center,” according to Martinez. She felt the destroying of the book, her reputation, and everybody’s trust was one of the typical things conducted by the government. Many activists concluded that in New Mexico such infiltration explained the destruction of *500 years of Chicano History*, which appears to be true when using Martinez’s article and ATM member’s oral histories together. The ATM never recovered from the incident within New Mexico. What was once believed to be a strong chapter of the organization had broken away and members indicate that they never spoke again with the activists that were there.

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<sup>266</sup> Martinez, “A View From New Mexico: Recollections of the Movimiento Left.”

Bill Gallegos recalls suspecting two particular activists as being agents that were the provocateurs behind the burning of the book.<sup>267</sup> Even if the FBI did not destroy the book, the belief remained in the minds of activists like Gallegos. A distrust of the FBI and local police departments embedded in the minds of ATM members led to severe measures such as breaking phones and placing them in a freezer whenever they entered a new home.

The FBI's investigation into the ATM stopped in 1976. It can be inferred that they were no longer deemed a threat or perhaps resources were moved towards other pressing groups during the moment. An internal memo from FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley to the Sacramento and San Francisco offices of the Bureau stated "Where investigations of individuals are being conducted by your office based solely on their membership or association with ATM, you should immediately discontinue."<sup>268</sup> Dated on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1976, the memo effectively ended the surveillance of the ATM.

The Bureau began closing investigations into domestic issues during the year. They went from 21,400 open investigations in July, 1973 to 4,868 by March, 1976.<sup>269</sup> The decreasing of the number of open investigations was closely tied to the creation of the Church Committee by Congress in 1975. Congress created the committee to investigate the FBI's abuses of power and revealed improper Bureau activities such as how they mailed Martin Luther King Jr. audiotapes in hope that he would commit suicide. Findings by the committee resulted in President Gerald Ford adopting new internal guidelines for the FBI's activities.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

<sup>268</sup> Air Teletype (AIRTEL) from Director, FBI to Special Agent in Charge (SAC), San Francisco, September 22, 1976, 1, box 1, folder 27, Ernesto Chavez Collection of Chicano Movement FBI Records, 146, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>269</sup> Aaron J. Leonard and Conor A. Gallagher, *A Threat of the First Magnitude: FBI Counterintelligence and Infiltration From the Communist Party to the Revolutionary Union 1962-1974* (London: Repeater Books, 2018), 190.

<sup>270</sup> Seth Rosenfeld, *Subversives: The FBI's War on Student Radicals, and Reagan's Rise to Power* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 500.

After years of investigating the ATM, FBI agents felt that the magnitude of the threat and harm the ATM advocated by armed overthrow of the government was extreme. Although they believed the group was fairly small, and the likelihood of the organization leading a revolution realistically could not occur; they did fear that the group was converting others to communism and achieving unity with other communist groups. These mergers and influences on workers made the agency believe that a new Communist Party could in fact be built. The successful creation of this new group could pose a considerable threat to the government. Although the threat did not appear to be immediate, the FBI did believe there would be danger in a further investigation of ATM members. Despite these comments from FBI special agents, Attorney General Edward H. Levi still decided to end the investigation of the group and its members.

The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement navigated its founding and the Cold War era political surveillance by the FBI with secrecy and a heavy probationary screening period for prospective members as indicated by their study group classes. Not everyone that came into contact with the organization decided to join, but it did attract members beyond just Chicana/os including other Latina/os, whites, and African Americans. Although this chapter only highlights how people eventually joined the group and what they did upon joining in regards to studying and writing the organization's founding theories; they also organized during this time period based on the ideologies they read in their study classes. Their activism with laborers and students are at the center of the next chapter which was heavily informed by the study classes discussed here.

### CHAPTER 3: The Labor and Student Activism of the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, 1974-1978

“We had a meeting at a prospective member’s house in the Orange County. For security reasons we took his phone apart and put it in the freezer. He went, ‘what did you do that for?’ We didn’t know how to deal with the issues of security.”

-Bill Gallegos, 2018

“Leadership had to be at the point of production. Here is the United States [around 1974] losing industries and it is a group that is disappearing...People at the point of production were disappearing. The leadership had a very narrow view...Factories [were] moving out in the 1960s and 1970s.”

-Arturo Diaz, 2018

Former National Secretariat member of the primarily Chicana/o communist organization the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement (ATM), Bill Gallegos, recalls entering the home of a Librarian from a Southern California University who was a member of a study group. Arturo Diaz had been a member of an Orange County Collective of intellectuals who studied political economy with the ATM.<sup>271</sup> Diaz remembers the ATM being clandestine because they feared infiltration from the FBI. Diaz felt that the ATM’s excessive approaches perhaps brought more attention onto themselves because if you were police “who do you look for, you look for the person acting suspicious.” He also felt the ATM romanticized practicing clandestine actions like breaking a phone to feel like they were taking part in the histories that the texts they were reading described. He also critiqued their labor organizing approach of focusing on the “point of production” in industries that were dying in the 1970s.

As shown in the previous chapter the ATM read writers such as Vladimir Lenin, Karl Marx, and Mao Tse-Tung who wrote their polemics under dangerous conditions. Diaz believed the ATM’s ideology of going to the point of production in the 1970s to organize workers as the

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<sup>271</sup> Arturo Diaz interview by Eddie Bonilla, February 28, 2018.

writers in the Marxist canon claimed deserved critique. This chapter explores how the ATM applied their theoretical engagements with their labor and student organizing despite people like Diaz believing their approach perhaps was not the best as they were organizing in industries that were moving to other parts of the world to pay cheaper wages.

The ATM challenged major labor unions as well as university administrations for institutional power, control and resources. This chapter provides two examples for the ATM's labor organizing as well as two examples for how they organized on college campuses. Each example reveals that the ATM faced structural challenges including trying to organize against unions such as the Teamsters and university administrators at places like the California State University of Los Angeles. They also had to deal with rival organizations like El Centro de Acción Social Autónomo (CASA) which also sought to make itself a Chicana/o vanguard party. CASA and the ATM were bitter rivals and the battle for Chicano Studies at CSULA shows that they were not only fighting for resources and control of an academic department, but they were also battling for the hearts and minds of university students. The two organizations primarily fought around the notion that the ATM followed Mao's communist China while CASA was closer to the Soviet Union and the Communist Party USA. Their struggles against each other are personified in their fights for the hearts and minds of students at campuses like CSULA.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation played a role on why the ATM operated as a clandestine group, as described by both Gallegos and Diaz. FBI records reveal that they tracked the employment locations of ATM members and which unions they were members of. FBI agents focused on the groups labor organizing and how they attempted to teach Marxism to workers. Since the founding of the ATM in 1974 according to the FBI the majority of members "secured jobs in factories and joined unions in accordance with ATM policy." They had become



established in at least “20 factories or plants and 12 unions, for the purpose of acting as Factory Nuclei and Trade Union fractions” to conduct external political education study groups to teach Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.<sup>272</sup> These activities were to educate workers to become communists and build a new Communist Party to use armed overthrow of the U.S. government. The ATM established itself in factories and companies including: Dasco (paper products), Western Yarn Company, Safeway Distributing Company, Steel Casting Company, Goodyear Rubber Company, Pacific Telephone Company, and others ranging from agricultural work to computer and telephone companies. Among the unions where the ATM had established factions included: The United Steelworkers of America, Local 2058, Teamsters Local 853, International Molders and Allied Workers, Local 164, Textile Workers Union of America, Local 915, Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, and seven others.<sup>273</sup> This meant ATM activists were successful in at least pushing the ideas going on within these unions and workplaces towards the left even if they were not successful in completely running the unions.

I use FBI records, oral histories, and ATM internal documents and those of CASA to examine how they participated across a variety of labor struggles and campus struggles to show that they were not just students of Marxism but rather they also practiced what they preached. This praxis as shown in their documents, whether they were successful or not, always resulted in follow up polemical pieces as a result of practicing the Maoist art of criticism and self-criticism that would in turn help their future activism. The labor struggles the group were a part of can superficially be examined in the terms of success or not but instead I seek to explore how they learned from their activism and how they used these lessons in future struggles. For example, the

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<sup>272</sup> “AUGUST TWENTYNINTHMOVEMENT,” JULY 20, 1976, 13, box 1, folder 27, Ernesto Chavez Collection of Chicano Movement FBI Records, 146, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid, 29.

group over time learned that they needed to acknowledge the background of workers including their citizenship status in order to become better organizers. In order to understand the theoretical and organizing development of members of the ATM it is important to acknowledge what they did before 1974 and after 1978 when the organization joined with Asian Americans and African Americans to create a multinational communist party. The lessons they learned between 1974-1978 would inform their political lives, even through the present.

### **Dasco Strike, 1974**

The ATM learned important lessons when putting the ideologies such as those from Lenin on labor unionism that they read and debated in study groups into practice during the Dasco strike of 1974. The strike was the most significant workplace struggle involving the East Bay Labor Collective (EBLC), which began as a response to the firing of a shop steward who was affiliated with the EBLC.<sup>274</sup> After the firing of the shop steward on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 41 day workers walked out of the Oakland finishing paper plant demanding the rehiring of the steward.<sup>275</sup> The plant was composed of 85% immigrant workers, the majority female, and also employed a multinational workforce with the largest groups being Chicano and Chinese. The strike reached a high of 200, but by May 16 only twenty workers continued striking. Members of the ATM spread leaflets such as Farah strike propaganda that mentioned the need for “workers unity” and advocated the importance of unionizing the Southwest. They also wrote about their fight against runaway shops that were leaving California for other locations in the U.S. or around the world to pay for a cheaper labor pool. The ATM also participated by attempting to create study groups to read Lenin and participating on the picket line.

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<sup>274</sup> The League of Revolutionary Struggle, “History of the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement (Marxist-Leninist).

<sup>275</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, “The Wildcat and its Lessons for the Communist Movement in the U.S.” First Published 1974. *Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism On-Line* Last accessed 3/24/19. <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1a/atm-dasco.htm>

As a result of the strike, 37 workers lost their jobs and the ATM was left to consider their successes and failures considering the strike was ultimately a failure. However, the 16-day wildcat strike according to the ATM, “failed in its immediate aims, taught many important political lessons, particularly to the political organizations involved in the strike.”<sup>276</sup> The ATM considered the EBLC as being amateurish in organizing workers since they had only worked in agitating for support of the Farah strike and done some minimal farm worker organizing. They utilized the failed strike to consider the things that were learned.

The ATM argued that the failure of the Dasco strike resulted from a lack of experience and theoretical knowledge of Marxism-Leninism. According to members of the ATM the majority of the “most advanced workers” at the Dasco plant did not make the qualitative leap to communist consciousness. “We did not do this work – political exposures, propaganda, etc. – because we failed to grasp the central task of all communists, the building of a new Marxist-Leninist party,” they reflected.<sup>277</sup> An ATM pamphlet written to self-reflect after Dasco later states:

We did not understand concretely how to take Marxism-Leninism to the advanced workers. We did not understand the necessity to combine legal trade union work and the illegal preparation and training of the workers as revolutionaries, how to bring workers into Marxist-Leninist study and to bring forth propaganda to the most advanced. We did not understand that we had to unite the advanced around ourselves (on a political basis) in order to reach and win over the intermediate and the backward. We did not understand that the nuclei (small groups of communist-workers who guide the political and economic struggle in a factory), is our link to the masses, the vehicle for carrying our line to the class.<sup>278</sup>

It is clear that the self-criticism by the ATM signals their recognition that they failed to create a nuclei of advanced workers to sustain the strike. They, as stated in the pamphlet, did not understand that they needed the trade union to be a vehicle to being able to spread propaganda to

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<sup>276</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, “The Wildcat and its Lessons for the Communist Movement in the U.S.”

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

sway workers to communism. The unity statement described earlier stressed the need for the new Communist Party to link labor unions and convince them to join the class struggle.

The EBLC portion of the ATM should have begun with a comprehensive analysis of the Dasco strike as stated in hindsight by the group. The history of the plant, past worker's struggles, the union's history, and the breakdown of the workforce needed to be conducted in order to train the workers. Mao Tse-Tung, who heavily informed the ATM's labor organizing approach, claimed that communist leaders must know the background of those they are working with, but most importantly they should participate in the various labor struggles of all workers.<sup>279</sup> He critiques the role of the vanguard and Marxist-Leninists as not solely being theoretical producers; rather communists must participate with the workers they seek to organize. The members of the ATM would follow Mao's critiques of the vanguard, but their larger political trajectory would reveal the organizations retreat from working amongst the workers they sought to organize.

Members of the ATM felt the organization should have explained the capitalist system to the workers and the role of the proletariat for bringing socialist revolution. They believed "While EBLC attempted to carry out political work during the strike (distributing and discussing Lenin's ON STRIKES with several workers, and passing out one propaganda leaflet) it was sporadic and unsystematic."<sup>280</sup> Scholars such as Carlos Muñoz Jr. have argued that the reason leftist organizations were not able to earn the hearts and minds of the community and workers was because of the rhetoric used by the groups. While the ATM argued that they attempted to teach Lenin's "On Strikes" the question of how it was received cannot be answered from the sources. The 85% immigrant workforce also highlights a hesitancy to acknowledge communist groups in a Cold War era that sought anything that looked like communism. Also, the fact that many in the

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<sup>279</sup> Mao Tse-Tung *On Practice and Contradiction* (London: Verso, 2007).

<sup>280</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, "The Wildcat and its Lessons for the Communist Movement in the U.S."

workforce were uneducated highlights the difficulty for understanding complex polemics that deal with larger theoretical and abstract concepts. Scholars have also stated the immigrant status of workers can also be seen as an obstacle facing Marxist-Leninists. Despite these obstacles the ATM believed they could have found the most advanced and politically conscious workers to take part in becoming exposed on a daily basis to the theoretical study of Marxism-Leninism. The failure of creating the classes and nuclei was a lack of leadership from the EBLC according to the ATM despite them distributing Lenin's literature.

The Dasco strike became a site where different communist oriented groups attempted to organize including the primarily female, Chinese American, I Wor Kuen. The activists in this organization came out of the 1968 student strikes at San Francisco State College and Berkeley and did mass work with the Chinese Progressive Association in San Francisco's Chinatown, which included bussing people to the Dasco picket line. The two groups were on the picket line together carrying signs in English, Chinese, and Spanish supporting the workers. Gallegos recalls people were crying while on the line because they were "so moved by the idea of solidarity, and the unity of the oppressed." An ATM pamphlet regarding the strike shows people from different ethnic and racial groups linking arms in unity. The two organizations translated the others polemics from Spanish to Chinese and Chinese to Spanish so that they could reach a bigger audience. IWK during this time and then in the subsequent years following the strike attempted to study and discuss the issues pertaining to women and communism. These two organizations would later merge to form the multiracial organization, the League.

The ATM activists saw the Dasco strike as a failure that resulted in the betrayal of the working class. They stated, "We BETRAY the working class if we fail to train workers theoretically, politically and organizationally and content ourselves with getting them to chose

one picket line after another. We BETRAY the working class if we fail to give the spontaneous struggles of the working class (like the Dasco strike).”<sup>281</sup> The failure of training workers and being associated with the firing of 37 workers did not, in the eyes of the ATM, result in workers adopting a Marxist-Leninist communist position. The ATM did however promise to correct their mistakes from the political lessons they learned. They claimed to have “attempted to systematically study the science of Marxism-Leninism...beginning to build communist nuclei in other factories where we work...organizing Marxism-Leninist study groups for advanced workers (where they both study and do political work), and distributing genuine communist propaganda and agitation.”<sup>282</sup> Despite their failures during the Dasco strike the organization felt they had learned important lessons and believed in their three keys to creating a workers revolution. The writers of the reflection end their analysis of the strike by stating they would continue studying Marxism-Leninism, distributing propaganda, and building communist nuclei in the workplace for workers to study and do political work. These lessons would later be tested.

### **Western Yarns Strike, 1976**

The ATM attempted to adapt their organizing strategy from the lessons they learned during previous labor strikes in their work on the Western Yarns strike in Los Angeles in 1976. They wrote, “On September 13, 160 workers went out on strike at Western Yarns. The remainder of the 200 workers at the plant did not come out because of lack of union sanction for the strike.”<sup>283</sup> The factory in Los Angeles was the site of a 23-day struggle to win demands for equality of languages, an end to the abuse of women, the right to strike, and for improved wages and benefits. The strike was inevitably ruled a loss by the ATM in their October editorial; in

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<sup>281</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, “The Wildcat and its Lessons for the Communist Movement in the U.S.”

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, “Western Yarn Strike Ends: Class Struggle Continues” First published 1976. Last accessed 3/24/19. *Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism* <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1a/atm-yarn.htm>

Maoist fashion, they self-criticized themselves for what they did wrong and also what they needed to improve. They stated, “due in part to the errors made by the August 29th Movement (M-L), the strike was not effective in winning the immediate demands. However, as a result of our work as open communists, the workers made political advances during the strike.”<sup>284</sup>

According to members of the ATM they were able to make political advancements with workers despite the role of capitalists who they claimed utilized any means necessary to break the strike. The lessons of the Western Yarns strike are in some ways similar and also different from prior strikes.

Members of the ATM claimed they openly presented themselves as communists so that they could teach workers how to fight for their demands against their employer. They detailed carrying out their communist duty in this section of the working class. ATM members began the work of fusing the working class movement with socialism. “From the beginning,” they wrote, “we brought an open communist presence to this strike although we did not have a single cadre working at Western Yarn First.” Workers were consolidated as being advanced into “those who actively studied Marxism-Leninism, were recognized leaders in the plant, were class conscious and totally dedicated to proletarian struggle.” An open ATM cadre assigned to the strike and these advanced workers were able to assist the mass of workers in formulating their demands, the writing of leaflets, and organizing the picket lines according to ATM documents. A small cadre was created to focus on the studying of complex polemics, a success the organization sporadically had in their previous experiences with strikers.

The ATM utilized self-criticism to acknowledge what they did wrong in a similar fashion that they did after the Dasco strike a few years earlier. They once again state that they repeated the error of not understanding the objective conditions surrounding the strike. They did not study

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<sup>284</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, “Western Yarn Strike Ends: Class Struggle Continues”

the historical facts about the Western Yarn workers, which was a major failure in their prior labor activism. The biggest mistake according to the ATM was underestimating the influence that union bureaucrats had on the masses of workers. Since their *Unity Statement* in 1974 the ATM argued that unions were bourgeois and needed political education to become communist.

The ATM critiqued the leadership of the Teamsters Union for being paid high salaries to help the employer exploit the striking workers. The failure to fully take into account the influence the Teamsters had on workers was a reflection of the ATM's failure to analyze the history of the workers at Western Yarns. They stated, "the fact that they had not taken part in prior mass struggles of any type. This history reflected itself in a certain amount of passivity on the strike line."<sup>285</sup> Members of the organization go on to write, "The majority of workers expected Teamster support when they decided to strike. The practical results were that many workers soon became demoralized when we were unsuccessful in forcing the Teamsters to sanction the strike."<sup>286</sup> Large trade union bureaucracies, including the Teamsters, according to members of the ATM, usually came "from the bribed section of our class." These trade union bureaucrats received "fat salaries" and had no interest in making changes as written by members of the ATM. They simply wanted to protect their "fat paycheck" and therefore had as much interest in "preserving capitalism as the capitalist does."<sup>287</sup> The ATM accused the Teamster's President Frank Fitzsimmons of having all his expenses paid by Richard Nixon's Wage Control Board to keep wages around the country low.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, "Western Yarn Strike Ends: Class Struggle Continues"

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.



The Teamsters, which were one of the largest unions at the time, had a history of corruption dating back to the early twentieth-century.<sup>289</sup> The fact that the ATM failed to realize the monolithic group they were challenged by within the Western Yarns workplace reveals their failure of analyzing the history of the factory. Labor unions would always be a challenge to the ATM since before its merger and even later in its political trajectory, which speaks to the greater struggle of communists within the United States attempting to organize in workplaces where there were established unions. This major mistake resulted in their failure of winning the demands of the workers, it was also a point of error they reflected upon after the Dasco strike. The two-year difference between the Dasco and Western Yarns strikes highlight how the ATM, despite their self-criticism, did not improve their strategies for organizing workers.

The ATM and its members also recognized that they underestimated the effects of working with a large percentage of undocumented workers, and also not effectively carrying out their line on the woman question.<sup>290</sup> Similar to the Dasco strike many of the workers at Western Yarns were undocumented. This resulted in many workers not participating in the strike for fear of being arrested and deported. Communists such as the ATM had to deal with this issue, but the organization admitted they approached the strike as if all workers were citizens, thus ignoring the backgrounds of the workers. Members of the ATM also believed that despite seeking equal rights for women since their *Unity Statement* they did not “consistently link the partial demands for equal wages and an end to company harassment with the basic demand for full equality.” They did not see the importance of childcare for all meetings, and they also did not consistently combat what they called the “male supremacist attitudes of some men strikers.”<sup>291</sup> They provided

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<sup>289</sup> See David Witwer, *Corruption and Reform in the Teamsters Union* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

<sup>290</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, “Western Yarn Strike Ends: Class Struggle Continues.”

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*

a case example where men the organization was working with whistled at a woman strike leader during elections for a committee position, which highlighted their errors of not recognizing the patriarchal nature of the strike.

The ATM recognized their errors with both immigrants and women as also being a major reason for the strikes failure. Scholar Antonio Rios Bustamante argues the ATM failed to theorize the “women question” successfully, which was a major flaw of most Marxist-Leninists during the New Communist movement and other organizations during the time period that followed other ideological forms of organizing.<sup>292</sup> However, scholar Laura Pulido claims from preliminary evidence that the ATM was the most conscious Marxist-Leninist group to the issues surrounding women workers during the 1970s.<sup>293</sup> As shown by the ATM’s self-criticism they recognized that they were not perfect, but rather they were not as informed as they could be, which also can be seen as an error that is a product of its time. However, this does not deny the fact that they too were susceptible to male chauvinism or of ignoring some of the gender dynamics at play in most organizations of the 1970s.

The members of the ATM published an article later in 1976 where they utilized self-reflection to analyze their role in Western Yarns strike that was not apparent when they were working amongst the strikers. The ATM stated that midway through the 23-day strike their weaknesses became apparent to the workers, members of the ATM, and the Teamsters leadership. They developed a plan for orderly retreat so that all the workers could return to the plant while having as few workers fired as possible. They wrote, “it is unclear how successful the retreat was. The company is gradually laying off the scabs and rehiring the strikers – although many strike activists will never get their jobs back. In a future article we will return to this

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<sup>292</sup> Antonio Ríos-Bustamante *Mexicans in the United States and The National Question* (Santa Barbara: La Causa, 1978).

<sup>293</sup> Pulido, *Black Brown, Yellow, and Left*.

question of retreat and deepen our analysis.”<sup>294</sup> The organization with its past experiences such as the Dasco strike where many workers were fired, attempted to retreat so that hopefully not many workers would lose their job. This quote highlights they were conscious of their errors that required reflection.

In a review of past agitation written detailed in an article published the summer of 1977, members of the ATM reflected upon their involvement in the Western Yarns strike. They analyzed a leaflet they passed out during the strike to attempt to better understand their failures of producing a successful strike. The leaflet opens with the statement, “The August Twenty-Ninth Movement (M-L) completely supports your just strike and demands. We are a communist organization made up of various nationalities. Since 1973-74 ATM has been acquainted with Western Yarn struggles.”<sup>295</sup> It is clear from the leaflet that the ATM openly showed they were communists to the workers. They then went on to describe the evils of capitalism to the workers while telling them the significance of their strike for the sake of toppling U.S. imperialism. They argued the Western Yarns strike was “a declaration to the rich parasites that you refuse to be slaves and to submit to their continuous exploitation and oppression.”<sup>296</sup> In their attempt to describe to the workers their relationship with capitalism the ATM admitted the leaflet came off:

in a preachy style much like a teacher rather from the standpoint of an organization which is directly at the head of the struggle and one which the workers are familiar with. It tends to place distance between the workers and the communists. This is bad and inexcusable for communists, ALL OUR agit/prop work must be done with feeling, like we are one with the masses.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement “A Brief Review of Some Agitation and Propaganda” First published 1977. Last accessed 4/25/15. *Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism*. <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1a/atm-agit-prop.htm>

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement “Western Yarn Strike Ends: Class Struggle Continues.”

Marxist-Leninists as stated by Lenin, Mao, and the ATM were meant to work amongst the workers in ways that could teach the ideology for a worker's revolution. Coming off as preachers in a teacher fashion reveals the many critiques vanguard theory faced since workers could become susceptible to alienation when told what to do. Members of the ATM believed they did not successfully inform the workers of why their struggle was a part of a larger systematic struggle that needed to occur against capitalism. The lack of feeling the ATM refers to be directly correlated to the failure of realizing the experiences of the workers and treating all workers struggles as the same, which they were not.

The ATM in 1977, as they did in their 1976 reflection on the Western Yarns strike, were critical of their stance on immigrant and women workers in their leaflet. They believed the major weaknesses of their leaflet was its "failure to address in a deeper way the issue of the immigrant workers and the woman's question."<sup>298</sup> They go on to state, "Oh, we mention the woman's question, and we make reference to the U.S. rip-off of Mexico – but that is all."<sup>299</sup> The ATM considered if they really wanted the masses of workers to develop a vital interest in socialism, they should have devoted larger portions of the leaflet to the questions. They argued if they had done this "Then when discussing socialism we could have said what socialism would mean specifically for immigrant workers and for woman."<sup>300</sup> These major issues according to the ATM would have improved their chances of winning the demands for workers but instead they were able to gain the success of swaying workers to learn about Marxism-Leninism. The losses by the ATM at Dasco and at Western Yarns would become highly influential on their later political trajectory in 1977 and 1978.

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<sup>298</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, "A Brief Review of Some Agitation and Propaganda."

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

The activists within the ATM continuously held ideological debates in house that may be associated as an outcome of requiring organic intellectuals to dependency on interpreting complex polemics. The revolutionaries they idolized from the Soviet Union, Cuba, and China also faced similar challenges from political opponents. Political debates often occurred within international organizations created by the difficulties of applying theory to practice. The ATM as a collective eventually retreated from the mass work amongst workers to instead favor ideological debates so that they could revise their strategies for creating a revolution. Members in an article in 1977 state, “What this meant was calling almost all of the mass work to a standstill, and gearing most of the cadres’ activity to study and internal discussion.”<sup>301</sup> They continue, “The essence of this view was that ATM would build the party and train its cadres for revolutionary work through a process of study and debate.”<sup>302</sup> Following their losses at the Dasco strike and the Western Yarns strike, and the reflections upon their failures, the ATM retreated into their study circles so that they could correct their cadre training and party building ideologies.

### **ATM vs. CASA for Chicano Studies and Chicana/o College Students**

The ATM was not only active in factories and among workers rather the more they recruited activists the more they got involved on college campuses. In their four-year life span they began to have strongholds on California State campuses and community colleges. When they later helped to create the League of Revolutionary Struggle, these campuses would remain important and activists would also organize at private universities like Stanford and on University of California campuses like Berkeley.

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<sup>301</sup> The League of Revolutionary Struggle, “History of the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement (Marxist-Leninist).”

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

Following the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and Title IX in 1972 students of different ethnic backgrounds entered institutions that would become sites of protest during the turbulent 1960s. College campuses became incubators for rebellion across the country. Scholars have focused on the development of Ethnic Studies and examine the activism at San Francisco State College in 1968 where students crossed racial lines in order to fight for ethnic studies. The Third World Strike raised the political consciousness of students of different ethnic backgrounds, including Asian Americans. It also provided inspiration to other students and campuses within the Bay Area and across the country. Chicano historian Rodolfo Acuña states, “The best-known student movement for the Ethnic Studies programs was at San Francisco State College (SFSC), influencing students of color statewide”.<sup>303</sup> The Third World Strike, which began in 1968, was a site where organizations such as the Black Panthers supported campus based student organizations for the creation of Black Studies, and subsequently other Ethnic Studies programs. Chicanos and Asian Americans fought alongside African Americans to create a Third World Liberation Front that won the establishment of Ethnic Studies on the college campus. The strike by college students resulted in severe repression from campus administrators, as well as Governor Ronald Reagan. Reagan and others in power in California at the time were growing angry at the campus activity sweeping universities and colleges in the state of California. As a result of the strikes an Ethnic Studies department was created in 1969. This strike created a ripple effect around the country in which other students would fight for the creation of Ethnic Studies that included Chicano Studies, Black Studies, and Asian American studies.

Acuña highlights that other protests were occurring at similar moments such as the SFSC strike, especially across California colleges that had the highest numbers of Chicano students, as

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<sup>303</sup> Rodolfo Acuña, *The Making of Chicana/o Studies: In the Trenches of Academe* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 46.

well as large numbers of African American and Asian American students. Scholar Ibram Rogers states Black campus movements “emerged in 1965 and declined in 1972,” with “hundreds of thousands of black campus activists (and sympathizers), aided on some campuses by white, Latino/a, Chicano/a, Native American, and Asian students, requested, demanded, and protested for a relevant learning experience.”<sup>304</sup> Student protests emerging in 1965 challenged the metanarratives found within traditional academic disciplines such as history, English, and other fields to include the recognition of other people and their experiences that were excluded from higher education.<sup>305</sup> The students at various universities across the country were strongly supported by community activism interested in the production of knowledge for members of society normally excluded from American narratives.

Upon being in an ATM study group, Theresa Montaña also became active in Chicano and Chicana student groups and organizations while being a student at the California State University of Los Angeles (CSULA). She was present on the campus when the bitter fights between CASA and ATM over the Chicano Studies program from about 1975-1977 raged on. Documents written by both CASA and ATM pose the other group as if they were infiltrating and taking over Chicano students group and the Chicano student movement not only at CSULA but also at the University of California Santa Barbara. This results in the historical record being messy in regards to the logistical events, but one thing is for certain—each organization sought control of Chicano studies as well as attempted to neutralize the other. It is clear, moreover, that they were fighting over resources and power that was available within institutions like CSULA.

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<sup>304</sup> Ibram Rogers. *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

<sup>305</sup> I define traditional disciplines as those that have been integrated in higher education including history, English, political science, anthropology, sociology, and the others that have existed longer than sixty years.

An ATM document titled “CASA Attacks the Chicano Movement” written in 1977 details the events at CSULA and UCSB. The author(s) of the document indicate that CASA was producing “confusing” position papers attacking the ATM and essentially participated in redbaiting ATM members. Redbaiting between groups was at times common in order to push out existing activists from a different political line such as this example between CASA and the ATM. At the heart of the issue at CSULA between CASA and ATM lied control over resources, faculty hiring, and positions of leadership in organizations such as El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA). ATM charged CASA of “aiding CSULA administration: in the firing of two progressive faculty members and that they tried to “eliminate democratic control” at the university. CASA, according to ATM, also attempted to disrupt a MEChA conference at UCSB around the same time. The fight was not a struggle between two groups in the perspective of the ATM rather they wrote that CASA was attacking the “democratic rights of Chicanos and all students.”<sup>306</sup>

A timeline of events provided by the ATM sheds more light on why the two organizations fought at CSULA. Members of the ATM believed that CASA and one of their leaders Carlos Vasquez sided with “reactionary” CSULA faculty. In December of 1976, ATM charged CASA with attacking people for being members of ATM and urged for their expulsion from MEChA. By January 1977, CASA began stacking MEChA meetings and elections to win positions of leadership but when they failed they established their own independent MEChA. This then meant that two different organizations existed at the CSULA campus, one with ATM members and another constituted by CASA members. After this failure to gain control of MEChA, ATM declared that CASA and its allies within the faculty claimed “corruption and

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<sup>306</sup> August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, “August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement (ML) Responds: CASA Attacks the Chicano Movement.” Box 25, Folder 8, Centro de Accion Social Autonomo Papers, 1963-1978, Special Collections, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.



racism” in Chicano studies in February of the same month. This is when the redbaiting of faculty occurred as told by the ATM. Other charges claimed by the ATM of CASA included their attempt at stealing 6,000 campus newspaper because it ran an article describing both sides of the struggles in Chicano studies.<sup>307</sup>

Control and influence over students and faculty laid at the root of the CSULA battle between the two organizations. ATM believed that CASA affiliated faculty opposed student control of Chicano studies and historically sided with campus administration. They even claimed that CASA called police and “ratted” on Chicano students. CASA propaganda also redbaited organizations like the ATM that were semi-secret by naming 20 individuals including their names, who they were associates of, and if they were influenced by the ATM who claimed none of the people listed had any connection with them. One position paper read like a “research paper for Joe McCarthy.”<sup>308</sup>

The struggle within MEChA at CSULA was a “struggle for direction for the Chicano and working class movements: reform or revolution, multinational unity or narrow nationalism.” The integrity of MEChA and the democratic rights for all students were things the ATM advocated should happen not only on the CSULA campus but at other colleges as well. According to their documents the ATM upheld the right of independent MEChAs to vote and declare their affairs. They also upheld the right of “individuals and organizations to provide leadership based on their political views and practice.” Although these are the claims of the ATM in their own documents, CASA held an opposite view of what occurred at CSULA.

CASA within their own documents argued that it was actually the ATM that “infiltrated and disrupted” the MEChA student organization. They argued ATM members were trying to

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<sup>307</sup> August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, “August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement (ML) Responds: CASA Attacks the Chicano Movement.”

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

“influence and control Chicano community and student organizations” during the 1970s. Similar to the ATM document they charged their rival organization with a host of accusations that reveals more about the fight at CSULA from the perspective of the organization. CASA wrote that ATM was involved in “corruption” associated with a handful of students and three faculty members. ATM was “exposed” in the university for operating within governing bodies of the Chicano studies department. “ATM cadres and sympathizers acquired work study positions and salaries without doing the required work,” according to CASA.<sup>309</sup> This reveals perhaps a bit of jealousy from CASA that ATM had integrated itself within the Chicano studies department and had access to resources that they did not have.

One of the charges CASA accused the ATM of doing was gaining control of the student faculty advisory board at CSULA. This was actually something Theresa Montaña was a part of according to an interview. CASA believed that ATM was creating part-time positions in order to hire ATM associated faculty. James “Jimmy” Franco, who was a part of LRUP’s Labor Committee and helped to found the ATM, was a professor at CSULA during this time. CASA believed that with people like Franco and Montaña at the university the ATM was “immorally and unlawfully” usurping power to benefit themselves and their friends with “jobs, loans, scholarships, and positions” in order to support their outside organization.

These documents written by both organizations reveal a grappling for power at CSULA among student groups and within the institution itself. It is hard to decipher between the charges hurled at each group by the other but it is clear that CASA did not like that ATM had positions of leadership and power at the university. The documents however also hide events around the fights on the campus. Bill Gallegos, a former member of the National Secretariat of ATM, recalls

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<sup>309</sup> “UCSB El Congreso Elects New Leadership,” Box 22, Folder 12. Centro de Accion Social Autonomo Papers, 1963-1978, Special Collections, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

that both organizations had their “thumpers” whenever things would get physical at different struggles including CSULA. He remembers both organizations having enforcers who were often armed with guns in case the fights escalated and they needed to protect themselves. According to Gallegos, ATM was one of the only organizations that could stand up to CASA’s “bullying.” CASA, as revealed by Gallegos and primary sources, used to hold tribunals modeled after the large public trials held in Cuba after the Revolution by Fidel Castro to charge people with crimes in front of large groups of people.<sup>310</sup> These trials in Cuba were meant to legitimize the revolution while the same can be seen in regards to CASA attempting to take leadership of the Chicana/o left and the Chicana/o movement. In 1973, for example, CASA charged individuals from other Chicana/o movement organizations like La Raza Unida Party as well as former members of their group with disruption and causing division in the Chicana/o movement. When CASA attempted to do this with the ATM at CSULA they did not stand down. The organizations waged debates over theories like those around the Chicano national question but fist-fights were not a rare occurrence. Gallegos also remembers people carrying weapons on college campuses in case a fight broke out. In particular, Theresa Montaña remembers many of the fights revolving around Gallegos who eventually became her brother-in-law after she married his brother because he was one of the more visible members of the group.

Physical fights between ATM and CASA as well between people who were sympathizers with either organization also existed at other campuses including the University of California, Santa Barbara. While the two organizations fought over control at CSULA they also sought

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<sup>310</sup> Trials against former leaders of the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship received often-violent consequences seen as an attempt by the new government to establish legitimacy to the world. The issue of legitimacy discussed by Chase serves as a lens analyzing the internal events in Cuba following the revolution, while acknowledging that the rest of the world also viewed the trials discussed. Michelle Chase, “The Trials: Violence and Justice in the Aftermath of the Cuban Revolution,” in Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph, eds. *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence in Latin America’s Long Cold War* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010): 163-198.

influence over El Congreso at UCSB and MEChA. El Congreso is an organization that still exists today that CASA described as a “strong Chicano-Mexicano” student organization. In February of 1977, the organization was going through internal strife in which CASA and ATM were both active in. Found in the pages of a publication that does not list any authors or organizations, but ATM in their own document infers CASA wrote it, the ATM is charged with using “divisionary ideological positions” that heavily influenced the Mesa members of El Congreso. The language in the document reads almost identically to those written about the CSULA events and the charges of ATM having control of another organization are repeated. El Congreso’s Mesa was the elected leadership and CASA felt that ATM was using it for their own ends. It is alleged that this Mesa influenced by the ATM created a new constitution that undermined the “longstanding basic Chicano student rights.”<sup>311</sup>

In this particular example, the ATM is charged with influencing the censorship of Congreso members by using “gang tactics” to physically threaten and intimidate opponents. Roberto “Beto” Flores, a key member in the ATM’s student activism, is listed as a clear influencer of people at UCSB since he lived and organized out of ATM’s Oxnard/Ventura district. The writers of the document show that Flores had connections to a student in UCSB’s Congreso who was the cousin of his wife. This cousin was an associate of the ATM and allegedly sold their newspaper *Revolutionary Cause* on the UCSB campus. Elements of the ATM from Los Angeles, Ventura, and Oxnard constantly attended events at UCSB including one on a statewide meeting against the Bakke issue on February 5<sup>th</sup> 1977. At this event it became evident that ATM also had a heavy influence on the MEChA at Ventura College due to a set of cousins being especially close to Flores. Other ATM elements that made appearances at the UCSB

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<sup>311</sup> “UCSB El Congreso Elects New Leadership.”

campus included Bill Flores and Yvonne de los Santos that fronted as members of other organizations according to the document.

A CASA member known as Miguel wrote up a summary to Carlos Vazquez who was in CASA's leadership connecting the events at CSULA and UCSB. He opens his report that CASA received word that the Congreso at UCSB had been "taken over" just as the "CSLA MECHA was" and that these events fell into the ATM's "plot." The prior conference mentioned on February 5<sup>th</sup> received the bulk of the attention in the report. Miguel shows that 24 campuses attended the conference and that CSULA did not have a vote at the event. "Both factions" of MEChA were present at the event and the division was accepted by the body because nobody opposed the existence of "illegitimate reps from MECHA-ATM." This clearly shows that the split at CSULA did not just impact activism in that location but rather reverberated across different institutions. Communist organizations such as CASA and ATM attended the conference as well. Miguel shows that ATM member Bill Flores led a delegation of approximately 25 people, some of which were "posing as MECHA Cal State LA," and another person labeled as "La Bruja" represented the East Los Angeles Committee for Democratic Rights. Along with these members were one ex-faculty from CSULA to which Miguel calls a racist. Beto Flores was also listed as an attendee who did the ATM's "bidding."<sup>312</sup>

The meeting was to establish a communications network that would connect the various MEChA chapters across the state of California in which sympathizers of the ATM created the idea. Before the meeting, CASA distributed documents from their newspaper *Sin Fronteras* in opposition to the ATM's position. Miguel closes the report by saying that CASA needed to plan mass mobilizations in conjunction with MEChA which reads as if the organization was also

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<sup>312</sup> Miguel, "Report on Student Work" February 10, 1977, Box 30, Folder 3. Centro de Accion Social Autonomo Papers, 1963-1978, Special Collections, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

seeking influence over the student group. CASA, like ATM, argued that they needed to emphasize the “fortification and independence of MEChA centrales.” Once again it seems as if CASA was heavily critical of the ATM for being successful in having political sway over students that had power in organizations like El Congreso.

Beto Flores acknowledges and admits that the ATM did attempt to establish influence and control over student groups in a similar manner that they did with labor unions in the name of party building. However, he believes that critiques leveled at the ATM of trying to overtake nationalist organizations like MEChA are somewhat skewed. He argues that both groups overlapped in “revolutionary spirit, passion” and wanting to do something to change Chicana/os position in the United States. He remembers trying to use national MEChA as a “command post” or to have leaders within MEChA. Theresa Montaña believes that allegations that ATM was operating from outside of the Chicano movement were “bullshit.” “I didn’t overtake anything,” she exclaimed in an interview conducted in 2018. Her life’s work and trajectory were a result of helping build MEChA and the Chicano student movement even before she became a Marxist-Leninist and member of ATM. “They made it seem like we were an outsider without the recognition that damn it I helped build MEChA,” Montaña argued in response to being asked about the events at CSULA in which she was most active.

Bill Gallegos upon reflecting on the events at CSULA and the fights with CASA believes the two organizations could have linked up on a range of things except they could not get over the “stupid China-Russia shit.” The two groups fell into different spheres of influence in the New Communist movement. CASA followed the Soviet Union while the ATM believed in Mao’s China. This distinction resulted in fights and splits in the U.S. communist movement. CSULA according to Gallegos was one of the most radical Chicano studies programs during the 1970s

since students had a say in the hiring of individuals. Professors included longtime labor organizer Bert Corona who was affiliated with CASA, and Jimmy Franco who was a key figure in the ATM and was a key writer of their foundation document on the Chicano national question. Both Franco and Corona taught dialectical historical materialism in their courses according to Gallegos who remembers seeing their syllabi.

Students had a say in hiring faculty and the administration was able to get rid of this while ATM and CASA were busy fighting against one another instead of uniting to fight the CSULA administration that was attacking Chicano studies. Gallegos recollected, “When we looked up after the smoke they had booted out all lefties from Chicano Studies and brought in the mainstream” version of Chicano studies that began to sweep across departments and programs after the initial hire of Chicana/o community organizers. Instead of following El Plan de Santa Barbara which argued a connection for research conducted in the ivory tower to help communities, Chicana/o studies began losing this portion of its original founding that activists from the ATM and of the 1960s and 1970s fought for.

Documents from the time period and the reflections by scholars and former members of rival organizations argue that the ATM helped to stifle the Chicana/o movement by their “infiltration” of student groups. Similar things were waged at the group and other communists who organized within labor unions during the twentieth century. However, I argue it is important to understand that the organization sought institutional control in both unions and college campuses for the sake of waging their larger task of waging a socialist revolution. Although they were not successful in achieving their goals laid out in their *Unity Statement* and discussed in their study groups these events such as Dasco, Western Yarns, CSULA, and UCSB gave these activists the tools and experiences they needed to wage their next battles where they would again

have the chance of being successful. The CSULA example shows that the ATM, and CASA as well, were able to have sway in important decision making matters related to who was able to teach Chicano Studies at the university.

It is clear that the ATM forced organizations and activists from groups like CASA, MEChA, and El Congreso within the Chicana/o movement to grapple with what the ATM was trying to do in regards to creating the overthrow of the U.S. nation state. It was not only groups in the New Communist movement, trade unions, or the Chicana/o movement that kept a watchful eye of the theory and praxis of the ATM but rather they also caught the attention of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The ATM and its members were becoming influential in labor unions and college campuses while reading the Marxist canon in the name of party building that people had to reckon with their theory and praxis. Although they at times only had control of something like faculty hiring's or they were union president's this meant that other people had to at least decipher how to critique the organization. They would carry this platform into the League of Revolutionary Struggle, a multi-racial communist party, after they merged with Asian American and African American Marxist-Leninist groups in 1978.



CHAPTER 4: The Foundations of I Wor Kuen and the Revolutionary Communist League,  
1969-1979

“Revolutionaries Unite---From the iron streets of Black Blood Hurricanes---The Spanish speaking avenidas of gringo racist ugliness---the oppressed Chinatowns and Japantowns and Asian struggle history arenas—from exploited white workers sons and daughters of indentured servants east European & south European original ghetto dwellers from the red nations whose rich history is this land itself, who struggle against brute genocide goes on this very hour from the struggle of the women, twice oppressed and our third world sisters, with three strikes already thrown by our enemies. Unity of our struggles means terror in the enemy’s eyes Unity of just struggles, means death to imperialism and revisionist sweat gallons of dead lies”

– Amiri Baraka, “Countries Want Independence, Nations Want Liberation, and the People, the People Want Revolution! A Poem for the Unity of RCL and LRS”

This poem from the Black Arts activist Amiri Baraka highlights the connection of the struggles of workers in the United States and in what was then known as the Third World and a need for cross-racial, as well as transnational solidarity across social movements.<sup>313</sup> In 1978 the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement (ATM), a primarily Chicana/o Marxist organization of the Chicana/o movement, and I Wor Kuen (IWK), a primarily Asian American organization led by women from the Asian American identity movement, merged to form a multiracial Marxist organization. These organizations morphed into the League of Revolutionary Struggle that later combined with the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL). Formerly known as the Congress of African People (CAP), an African American organization of the Civil Rights-Black Power movements,

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<sup>313</sup> Scholarship that begins to look at these cross-racial coalitions include: Jeffrey Ogbonna Green Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Laura Pulido, *Black Brown Yellow & Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*; Victor M. Rodriguez, “Boricuas, African Americans, and Chicanos in the ‘Far West’: Notes on Puerto Rican Pro-Independence Movements in California, 1960s-1980s” in Rodolfo D. Torres & George Katsiaficas, eds, *Latino Social Movements: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives* (New York London: Routledge, 1999), Lauren Araiza, *To March for Others: The Black Freedom Struggle and the United Farmworkers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), Max Krochmal, *Blue Texas: The Making of a Multiracial Democratic Coalition in the Civil Rights Era* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

RCL merging with the League in 1979 signified a further push to form a multinational communist vanguard party.<sup>314</sup> Baraka was a major figure in CAP and the RCL as well as in black cultural circles. His poem which opens this chapter was written and republished in a League document to commemorate the merging of the organizations. In it he stressed the word “Unite” so that “Revolutionaries” could “win” the world to the side of communism.

Other organizations of different ethnic backgrounds would also merge with the ATM, IWK, and RCL around the ideologies of Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism. Each organization had a different history since the late 1960s but a common thread of frustration in nationalist movements and the ideology of cultural nationalism led them to become Marxist-Leninists and later to the creation of a multinational organization. The three main organizations that would make up the League each had a hybrid of nationalism related to their particular racial groups and social movements they came out of plus their allegiance to Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Thought (MLMT). They each had roots in their respective communities before moving towards Marxism and the Marxist canon. All three had similar yet different trajectories and the common language they had from the Marxist canon not only allowed for them to speak to one another but at the same time all three promoted the creation of a new Communist Party. This Communist Party and ideas around it meant they would seek to unite with other organizations eventually. Each believed that the number one task of Marxist-Leninist-Maoists should be party building which was the common goal among many groups of the New Communist movement.

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<sup>314</sup> Michael Simanga, a former member of CAP, RCL, and the League recently wrote a book on Baraka and both his and the organizations ideological development. Komozi Woodard has also written extensively about what Baraka meant to both the Civil Right and Black Power movements. Michael Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People: History and Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999)

This chapter outlines the genesis of the League in the movements from the late 1960s and 1970s beyond the ATM to understand how the experiences, ideologies, culture, and activism of each organization influenced the various venues of the activism of the League in the 1980s. This chapter ties the histories of the organizations in the various movements they participated in prior to the formation of the League to begin documenting how these activists merged into one group where they exchanged ideas, culture, and familial ties. I argue the activists who followed the Marxist canon swayed social movements throughout the twentieth century, but particularly from the 1960s to 1990, as they heavily influenced various kinds of activism in different sectors of society based on a search for equal rights and citizenship. These groups have largely been written about in their respective historiographical sections of social movements but I attempt to bring these different literatures together along with primary sources from the organizations to begin to examine how and why the League was formed.

Identity based social movements awakened many activists into mobilizing for their respective communities around self-determination and cultural pride, but it also created space for activists to create cross-racial coalitions based on class.<sup>315</sup> As Gordon Mantler argues, social movements around identity were not antithetical to class struggles, rather they could be complimentary.<sup>316</sup> Arguments and disagreements existed within nationalist and communist movements, as well as across movements based on ideology, but there was also room for cooperation. A historical framework that only acknowledges the cooperation or the conflict aspects of social movement building largely ignores the nuances of crossing racial lines.

In this chapter, I examine the formation and transition to Marxism-Leninism of IWK and RCL within their respective struggles across the country that created spaces for cooperation

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<sup>315</sup> Pulido, *Black Brown Yellow & Left*, Ogbar, *Black Power*

<sup>316</sup> Gordon K. Mantler, *Power to the Poor: Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960-1974* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

among the ATM, IWK, and RCL. These groups in particular struggled over issues of how to best organize workers for a societal revolution. By examining their challenges to cultural nationalism, labor struggles, participation in the fights for affirmative action, and their discussions around the national questions, I seek to show how the groups began to foresee the creation of a multinational vanguard based on the similarities of their struggles and polemics. Their involvement in these different forms of activism would later shape and form the political work of the League of Revolutionary Struggle.

The history of I Wor Kuen has been documented in Asian American social movement literature. The organization sought a society where one person did not have to exploit another in order to survive. They wanted a society that worked for the fulfillment of human needs. IWK, like the ATM and CAP, required “new recruits to take a study course in Marxism-Leninism, and the organization’s particular line and policies.”<sup>317</sup> The organization operated in both San Francisco and New York’s Chinatowns. The largely female and Chinese American organization closely worked with the ATM since the East Bay Labor Collective participated in the Dasco strike of 1974.<sup>318</sup> Based in the San Francisco Bay area and New York, IWK translated ATM propaganda into Chinese while the ATM translated IWK material into Spanish so that both organizations could work across racial and language barriers before they decided to formally merge organizations in 1978.

The transition of Black Power activists such as Amiri Baraka to Marxism-Leninism shows that some believed class struggle was necessary to change the situation of African Americans in the United States. Within U.S. historiography the bulk of the attention is often paid to Harry Haywood and earlier African Americans in the Communist Party USA, or the Black

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<sup>317</sup> Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London: Verso, 2002), 176.

<sup>318</sup> For more on the Dasco strike see chapter 3.

Panther Party of the 1960s and 1970s. Studies within Black Power historiography have focused on either the revolutionary nationalist Black Panthers, or the cultural nationalist organization US. Baraka participated in the US organization and closely followed their teachings of Kawaida, Kwanzaa, and the writings of their leader Maulana Karenga until he split with them in the mid 1970s.<sup>319</sup> Baraka was a poet and artist within the Black Arts movement while also being active in Black Power circles. Most famously he helped to organize the 1972 Black Political convention held in Gary, Indiana. His activism in such circles eventually led him to grappling with the Marxist canon and also caused tensions in his relationship with Karenga and activists in the Congress of African People.

The three organizations that went on to create the League including ATM, IWK, and RCL, were tied together by their anti-racist positions, their positions on the national question, and their adaptation of the Marxist canon. The three organizations were tied by their belief in the national question related to their particular racial groups. The chapter that follows this one explores how they achieved unity around the national question. The League would also continue pushing the national questions as they related to the Black Belt, the Sunbelt, and Asian communities. The national question inherently addressed the struggles for “democratic rights, against national and racial oppression and discrimination,” for example, for IWK and later the League. These organizations at first had a form of pragmatic activism around issues such as healthcare, political representation, resisting the Vietnam war, fair housing, and the treatment of languages. No struggle was more important for tying these organizations together than their activism around the *Bakke* decision which I explore at length in the next chapter.

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<sup>319</sup> Kawaida means tradition in Swahili. Scott Brown, *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, The US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York University Press, 2003).

The search for equal rights included battles over the treatment of different languages, equal education as seen by fights against the *Bakke* decision of 1978, the establishment of Ethnic Studies, and struggles over fair wages in battles of the period.<sup>320</sup> The activists of the organizations in their polemical claims consistently called for equal “social” or human rights. The organizations found common unity when working closely together on the Anti-Bakke Decision Coalition (ABDC), which was a national and multiracial organization that brought together people of different backgrounds into an organization to build support for affirmative action. IWK and ATM attempted to build attention in workplaces in regards to the fights on college campuses for affirmative action programs and Ethnic Studies, and believed that linking the struggles of college students could also be extended to factories and workplaces struggling for equal representation.

Black Power, Chicana/o, and the Asian American movements did not happen within a vacuum, instead, each influenced the other. The League is representative of an organization that attempted to create unity in a group. This resulted in cultural exchange as well as exchanges of ideas and a practicality of organizing in communities they perhaps were not organizing before. Each group instead first focused among communities connected to their own nationalities while doing support work for other racial and ethnic groups.

Major League figures such as Fred Ho from IWK and Amiri Baraka from RCL brought credibility to the League according to Max Elbaum. I seek to provide a close reading of how they came to unite with Chicana/o communists and later address what this meant for the ATM who had been working since 1974 to form a new multiracial communist party. The next chapters that

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<sup>320</sup> The Bakke court case refers Allen P. Bakke’s opposition to affirmative action when he was not admitted into the University of California, David School of Medicine. His fight against the Regents of the University of California made its way to the Supreme Court, which ultimately ruled against affirmative action in 1978. Many different protests were organized around the nation by minorities that fought for affirmative action and equal admission into universities.

make up part II of this dissertation address how the three organizations found commonality around the national question and the Bakke decision as well as how they mobilized surrounding the issues of the Chicana/o community. I believe it is first important to see how the groups found common ground to then understand how they came to organize together for their various communities within a multinational organization.

### **I Wor Kuen**

I Wor Kuen first formed as a revolutionary collective in New York city in 1969. During this same year the Red Guard formed in San Francisco. By the summer of 1971, the two merged but took the name I Wor Kuen when they became a national organization. The groups emerged either out of the Third World Strikes at Berkeley and San Francisco State Universities, or at universities in New York that were crucial in the evolution of Asian American radicalism.<sup>321</sup> After the battles at these universities for the creation of Ethnic Studies programs, many Asian American collectives took up other forms of community organizing. Max Elbaum, a former activist in the New Communist movement, argues they were two of the “earliest and most prominent groups” formed in 1969. Both were mainly, but not exclusively composed of young Chinese Americans from their inception.<sup>322</sup> They were influenced in their early stages by the Black Panther Party of the Black Power movement, and the Young Lords, a Puerto Rican revolutionary organization that also modeled itself after the Panthers. The newly formed national IWK took great inspiration from the Cultural Revolution in China and struggles in Vietnam. IWK would take up labor work as well which is where they interacted with the ATM. By exploring the origins of the organization it can be seen that their historical development ran

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<sup>321</sup> Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, 78.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

concurrent in many ways with those of the ATM and would result in working closely together and then merging the organizations.

Out of this campus and political climate the activists who would create the IWK emerged and believed that activism in their communities was needed as much as on the campuses and that a connection of the two was required. In a self-written and self-published summary of the IWK, they believed both the IWK and Red Guard played a “vanguard role in the Asian national movements.” Both recognized that only revolution could solve contradictions in capitalist society. Thus, they set out to build a movement to show that “everyday oppression and injustices that the masses face come from the system of imperialism.”<sup>323</sup> The development of the two collective’s ideologies towards Marxism-Leninism-Maoism was a result of their participation in other struggles in the nationalist based Asian American movement.

The collective in New York was formed by Asian American revolutionaries from diverse backgrounds including students, workers, and working class youth. During the first year and a half of their existence they created campaigns against the “poor living conditions” found in the Asian American community. This led them to conduct serve the people campaigns which included starting a door to door campaign in March 1970 to address Tuberculosis (TB) testing in Chinatown. The organization realized that Chinatown had the “highest TB rate in the country” because of “extremely overcrowded, decaying living conditions caused by capitalism and bad health services.”<sup>324</sup> Health care became a common form of activism for the IWK as they also waged a struggle regarding Governor Hospital in 1972 that resulted in the hiring of more Chinese speaking workers to better serve the community. The New York collective prior to the merger with the Red Guard also created Chinatown’s first draft counseling service to help young

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<sup>323</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *Statements on the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle (Marxist-Leninist)*, 1978, 29-30. Michigan State University Radicalism Collection. East Lansing MI.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid, 120.



Asians being drafted into the Vietnam war to fight against Indochinese people. Other forms of activism included a childcare school program so that Chinese working mothers could take up their concerns for their children's education.

IWK started a Panther-modeled free breakfast program and advanced a 12-point platform as early as 1969.<sup>325</sup> The IWK's 12-point program had many similarities with that of the Black Panthers.<sup>326</sup> IWK, in one of its most publicized pieces of propaganda, argued, "Asian people in Amerika have been continually oppressed by the greedy, traitorous gangsters of our own communities and by the wider racist exploitative Amerikan society." They continue, "We want to improve the living conditions of our people and are preparing to defend our communities against repression and for revolutionary armed war against the gangsters, businessmen, politician and police. When a government oppresses the people and no longer serves the needs of the people, we have the right to abolish it and create a new one." They called for self-determination for Asian Americans as well as all other Asians. IWK also sought the liberation of all Third World peoples and other oppressed groups, as well as an end to male chauvinism and sexual exploitation. Working from the perspective of fighting for world peace, the organization believed the needs of the people came first and is based upon love and unity of all peoples despite the existence of class distinctions.

Like the Black Panther Party, IWK also called for: decent housing, community control of institutions, educational reform, freedom of all political prisoners, an end to racism, an end to the

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<sup>325</sup> For more on the programs and services the Black Panther Party provided see: Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (University of California Press, 2013); Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992); David Hilliard, *The Black Panther Party Service to the People Programs* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008); Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Andrew Witt, *The Black Panthers in the Midwest: The Community Programs and Services of the Black Panther Party in Milwaukee, 1966-1977* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>326</sup> I Wor Kuen, "12-Point Program."

American military, and finally a socialist society.<sup>327</sup> Point number one for the organization was self-determination for Asian Americans. They contended that the masses of “Asian people in Amerika live in ghettos which are like small colonies. The Amerikan capitalists continually attempt to make profit off us by trying to alter our entire way of life for their own benefit.” IWK in their 12 points conveyed that they wanted liberation from enslavement so that they could determine their own destinies not based on the U.S. capitalist, and imperialist unequal structures.

Other aspects of the platform may have seemed harmless for some people during the 1970s, but the organization called for radical changes to education, housing, and the military as well. Calling for the freedom of all political prisoners and all jails from “racist” jails and asking for an end to the American military were tied to western imperialism, according to the organization. Education was one vital aspect of American society that needed to be changed to expose the “true history of western imperialism in Asia and around the world: which teaches us the hardships and struggles of our ancestors in this land and which reveals the truly decadent exploitative nature of Amerikan society.” This was closely tied to teaching American students about exploitative events in the history of the United States in relation to what was then called the Third World. IWK closely linked themselves with other minorities and platforms presented by groups such as the BPP and the Young Lords that wanted liberation of all Third World peoples and others who they deemed oppressed. They wrote, “People of color, Asian, Black, Brown, Red are all fighting for liberation from Amerika’s racist oppression... We recognize that only when the oppression of all people is ended can we really be free.”

Perhaps some of the most powerful points presented by the IWK dealt with male chauvinism, community control of land, and the establishment of a socialist society. They believed years of oppression under feudalism and capitalism established male supremacy over

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<sup>327</sup> I Wor Kuen, “12 Point Platform and Program.”

women. Building upon the work of Friedrich Engels and his writings on the family, IWK wrote, “Man must fight along with sisters in the struggle of economic and social equality and must recognize that sisters make up over half of the revolutionary army.” IWK, as written in the historical record, was a strong promoter of women to positions of leadership in leftist circles and strongly believed men and women were equals fighting for their people. The organization also sought control of their own institutions and land including: police, schools, housing, health, and welfare. This, they argued, would lead to an end of the community being used for profits by outsiders such as slumlords. The final point on the 12-point program and platform of the IWK called for a socialist society. They wrote, “We want a society where no man or woman will die due to lack of food, medical care or housing, where each gives according to his ability and takes according to his need.” Socialism was the ultimate end goal for IWK and their everyday work was an attempt to achieve completion of their goals laid out in the program.

While IWK was active in New York, the Red Guard Party maintained a presence in San Francisco’s Chinatown starting in the spring of 1969. They were also formed primarily of Asian American youth who had come out of community struggles against police harassment in Chinatown and the San Francisco College Third World Student strike of 1968.<sup>328</sup> The group took its name from the mass student groups in China that were mobilized and guided by Chairman Mao which shows instantly a connection by the group to the Cultural Revolution. They opened a store front office in the community and rallied around the Chinese Progressive Association which housed various community organizations and held cultural events. The RG participated in

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<sup>328</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *Statements on the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle*, 33. For more on the strikes see the writing of former IWK and League member Peter Shapiro and other scholars that have stressed the importance of the strike to Chicana/os, African Americans, and Asian Americans: William Barlow and Peter Shapiro, *End to Silence: The San Francisco State College Student Movement in the ‘60s* (New York: Pegasus, 1971); Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies*; Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus*; Acuña, *The Making of Chicana/o Studies*.

battles around stopping the destruction of the San Francisco Chinese community by redevelopment. Their most famous activism, and one that would remain recurrent in the history of the IWK and the League, was that to save the International Hotel (IHotel), that was a low-income occupancy residential hotel in the city composed of mainly Asian Americans.

The RG organized with youth in the community and Asian American students to fight the first attempts to evict the tenants of the IHotel in San Francisco in 1968-1969. The struggle led to tenants winning a lease in 1969 but the landlord set fire to the hotel prior to the lease being signed that killed three tenants while destroying a wing of the hotel. The IHotel became a center for activism and even housed community organizations and revolutionary groups that took up serve the people programs and anti-war activity.<sup>329</sup>

Similar to the IWK collective in New York, the RG conducted various serve the people campaigns. They fought for better TB treatment and testing centers in Chinatown and also began a free lunch program. The RG also started a draft help center to provide counseling services and education around the Vietnam War. The organization had rules and a ten-point program they would republish in their printed bilingual documents. Points for discipline included obeying orders in all actions and not taking anything from the poor. The organization in their first edition of “Community News” in March 12, 1969, declared that they wanted an end to the exploitation of the people in their community by the “avaricious businessmen and politicians who are one of the same.”<sup>330</sup> They declared that they wanted an immediate end to the brutal harassment of their people by the “racist pig structure” and to dedicate themselves against landlords and businessmen who “oppress the Chinese people.” Education, housing, and healthcare were also

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<sup>329</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *Statements on the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle*, 34.

<sup>330</sup> Red Guard, *Community News* Volume 1 Number 1, March 12, 1969, 1. New Left Collection Hoover Institute Stanford University Palo Alto, CA

components of their activism that they stressed. The RG like IWK and other organizations of the 1960s and 1970s molded themselves after the BPP's 12-point program. In particular, in their own 10-point political program they called for freedom and the power to "determine the destiny of our people, the Yellow community."<sup>331</sup>

Point three addressed that the RG believed they needed to expose the "true nature" of American society and the Vietnam war. They declared that they wanted an education that would teach "our true history and our role in the present-day society." Members of the RG understood that an educational system should give a knowledge of self. In their fourth point they argued that they wanted "all Yellow men to be exempt from military service" and that they not be forced to fight in the military service to "defend a racist government that does not protect us." It was felt that "Yellow people" should not kill other people of color in the world who were being victimized by the "white racist government of America."<sup>332</sup>

The organization maintained fundamental rules that every member of the party was expected to know verbatim. Not following the rules could result in suspension. Members were expected to be on time for all meetings. Party members also could not be "so HIGH" to the point that they could not function properly. They also were expected to not carry any weed, narcotics, or weapons that could get them "busted" while doing party work. Rule number seven stated that party members must not "Use, Point, Fire, a weapon of any kind at anyone except the Enemy."<sup>333</sup> Here is a close link to the ideology of the right to bear arms made re-popular especially in the Bay Area among activists after the rise of the Black Panther Party. All members were also expected to attend political education classes. In order to join the Red Guard any person underwent a six-month basic training program and their acceptance to members would be

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<sup>331</sup> Red Guard, *Community News* Volume 1 Number 1, March 12, 1969, 6.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid, 8.

decided by a review board. The process of studying remained a key component for the IWK and later the League as well.

The remaining six points of their platform addressed other issues facing the Asian American community. Police brutality and the release of all “Yellow men” held in prisons and jails were points five and six. Tied to these was the notion that all people brought to trial in court should have a jury of their peers from their Yellow communities. Free medical facilities, full employment, and the United States government recognizing the People’s Republic of China were the remaining three platform points. They believed that “Mao Tse-Tung is the true leader of the Chinese people” and that the U.S. government had proven that it would not mind putting people of color in concentration camps.<sup>334</sup> They linked the putting of Native Americans and Japanese Americans onto reservations or detainment camps to the struggles of Chinese people by arguing that the U.S. war time industrial complex and their war against China could result in the displacement of Chinese in the U.S.

Starting in 1970, IWK and the Red Guard began having discussions to share their experiences and lessons from their work and sought unity between the two groups. In 1971, after the discussions the IWK merged with the Red Guard to form a nationwide organization. In December of the same year the first major national meeting of the leadership was held. At this point, they made the “first attempt to systematically analyze from a Marxist stand.”<sup>335</sup> By 1972, they took up more studying of Marxist-Leninist works to address the international and domestic situations facing the revolutionary movement. After doing so they decided to adopt MLMT as their guiding ideology. They began to organize as a group seeking to build a new “genuine

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<sup>334</sup> Red Guard, *Community News* Volume 1 Number 1, March 12, 1969, 6-8.

<sup>335</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *Statements on the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle*, 41.

communist party in the United States.”<sup>336</sup> Party building became the central task of the organization like many others in the New Communist movement.

While taking up the ideology of MLMT, the organization continued mobilizing in their communities. Now a national organization with strengths in San Francisco and New York, they continued to do work against the poor health and housing conditions in Chinese communities. In 1973, they began to expand their work to include the Japanese American national movement. They helped to defend several buildings where residents and small shopkeepers lived or operated their businesses in both Chinatowns and Japantowns in both major cities.<sup>337</sup> This also included a reoccurring theme in the activism of the League in fighting for reparations for the injustices that Japanese Americans faced during World War II when they were sent to internment camps and essentially lost their homes and businesses.

IWK expanded their political activism to also work in student organizations on college campuses during the period of 1972-1975. They played a “leading role” in the formation of several Asian student unions on various campuses.<sup>338</sup> IWK believed they won many students to become revolutionaries and Marxist-Leninists during the struggles. Their fights were mainly around the “development and protection of ethnic studies” at places such as the University of California Berkeley, Laney College in Oakland, and at the City College of New York. This aspect of their activism would prove critical during the League’s life span.

Included in the newly formed national IWK’s political plans was doing more labor oriented work. In particular, they organized in the garment industry where large numbers of Chinese women were concentrated and worked in several sweatshops. A major strike they were

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42. <sup>336</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *Statements on the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle*,

<sup>337</sup> Ibid, 47-49.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid,

involved with was the Jung Sai strike that became a unionizing drive involving some 135 workers, mainly Chinese. IWK also remained active in the struggles of the IHotel which garnered international and national attention in 1977 when people attempted to tear it down that would have caused the displacement of predominantly Asian American residents.<sup>339</sup> Another key strike in the development of IWK was their involvement with the Dasco strike in Oakland, California which began after a union steward affiliated with the East Bay Labor Collective that would go on to create the ATM. During this struggle, one of the first in which the organizations worked closely together, IWK provided translations for ATM propaganda into Chinese while the ATM provided Spanish translations from Chinese for IWK. This would be a reoccurring theme in the activism of the LRS which was the treatment of languages equally.

The day to day work of IWK was heavily detailed in the organization's bilingual newspaper, *Getting Together*. Written in Chinese and English, *Getting Together* served as the political organ for the group where they disseminated both ideology and news about labor, education, and housing struggle across the nation. According to IWK the newspaper was the "first revolutionary newspaper" published in the contemporary "Asian national movement." The newspaper was the political organ of the group and was dedicated to developing a "revolutionary analysis of concrete conditions and contributing toward building a genuine communist party in the US."<sup>340</sup> The infrastructure the IWK had prior to the merger with the ATM would prove to be key for mass producing newspaper editions, theoretical journals, and other forms of propaganda. *Getting Together* Publications became a key to disseminating the League's political lines and general world news to a mass audience.

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<sup>339</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *Statements on the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle*, 51-53.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid*, 32.



IWK like most organizations of the New Communist movement produced a heavy amount of theoretical propaganda to disseminate their ideological stances and world news to the Asian American communities they sought to organize. The organization was primarily made up of, and led by women. This leadership would actually make up the Central Committee of the League, including the national chairperson who was a woman that was first active in IWK. Pamphlets published by the IWK addressed the “Lack of Childcare in the United States: Women go to work exhausted,” and “Win Women’s Liberation Through Revolutionary Struggle” which contained a collection of IWK articles from their newspaper *Getting Together*.<sup>341</sup> They also produced theoretical journals such as one on the National question and how it applied to Asian Americans, and another on the strike they were involved with like the Jung Sai one. The “woman question” and the “national question” were important for IWK as it would be for the RCL and the ATM.

### **The Congress of African People/ The Revolutionary Communist League**

The Congress of African People was founded in Atlanta in 1970 as a revolutionary and nationalist, as well as Pan-Africanist organization. This section seeks to outline how activists like Amiri Baraka from CAP formed the Revolutionary Communist League and transitioned from cultural nationalism to Marxism-Leninism.<sup>342</sup> By 1974, the organization shifted to Marxist-Leninist- Maoist Thought much like IWK and the ATM. Then in 1976, they become a communist organization which meant losing some of its original African American base that dismissed Marxism as a white European ideology. RCL merged with the League of

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<sup>341</sup> I Wor Kuen, *Win Womens Liberation Through Revolutionary Struggle: Selected articles from Getting Together*, March, 1978. Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives Printed Ephemera Collection on Organizations PE.036, Box 85. Tamiment Library, New York University, New York, NY.

<sup>342</sup> Max Elbaum and others claim that Baraka was one of the most prominent faces in the New Communist Movement along with Asian American activist Fred Ho, who also participated in the League of Revolutionary Struggle. Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*.

Revolutionary Struggle in 1979, but at this point it had lost many of its supporters and only people such as Michael Simanga followed Baraka into the League.<sup>343</sup> Historians and other scholars have focused on Baraka's ventures in cultural nationalism but his work with the League has been minimal. For example, Komozi Woodard's biography of Baraka does not mention the League but he does focus on how Marxism began to shape Baraka's ideological orientation.<sup>344</sup> I utilize Baraka primarily because he was a driving force, but the roles of other historical actors such as Simanga, and Amini Baraka, Amiri's wife, show that other members of CAP also believed in Marxism-Leninism.

Amiri Baraka became a student of Ron Karenga and the US organization that preached cultural liberation and a sense of discipline after meeting each other in 1967 where they helped plan the 1967 Black Power Conference. Simanga claims that Baraka became a student and disciple of Karenga instantly and the philosophies of "cultural revolution and reconstruction, especially the rejection of Western white values and acceptance of African values."<sup>345</sup> The US organization advocated strongly ideas of cultural nationalism, but they also promoted polygamy and an organizational structure that discriminated against female activists in the group.<sup>346</sup> The Baraka's quickly began to disagree with this and tension grew between Karenga and Baraka after the 1969 shootout on the University of California Los Angeles campus where it is believed US members killed two Black Panthers.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Simanga claims in his book that he was the chair of the Black Liberation Commission of the League. Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People*.

<sup>344</sup> Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation*.

<sup>345</sup> Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People*.37

<sup>346</sup> For more on the US organization see: Scot Brown, *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, The US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2003). Elaine Brown, a former Black Panther activist, depicts in her autobiography her meeting Karanga at her party and being treated as not equal to men at a party. She was told to treat the men in a fashion she was not comfortable with. Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992).

<sup>347</sup> I say "believe" because there are conflicting accounts of the shootout that took place. Many believe the escalation of the tension between the BPP and US was a result of police agitation via programs such as

The UCLA incident, as well as disagreements over political ideologies regarding the role of women in the Black Power movement, led to Karenga having no role in the largest gathering of Pan-African nationalists in September 1970 in Atlanta that led to the creation of CAP. The 1970s were a moment when Amiri Baraka eclipsed Karenga as a national leader despite the US organization's creation of Kwanzaa. According to Peniel Joseph, a leader in Black Power Studies, on Labor Day weekend 1970, Baraka presided over a meeting of "four thousand black nationalists in Atlanta." CAP's conference attempted to "draw Black Power groups from the United States and abroad into a coalition." Joseph argues Baraka had "emerged as a political activist and black nationalist theoretician, eclipsing his mentor Ron Karenga."<sup>348</sup> The 4,000 people in attendance from around the country participated in the creation of CAP. The organization would play a strong hand in the 1972 National Black Political convention in Gary, Indiana, while promoting Pan-Africanism. The activists in the group utilized a fusion of Pan-Africanism and nationalism to connect their struggles in the U.S. to those occurring in the Third World. This included organizing various forms of African Liberation rallies and marches throughout the 1970s. The new organization still utilized some of Karenga's and the US organizations ideologies such as nationalism and Kawaidea but they tweaked them to better fit the issues facing women in the United States.

The dominant ideology found in the US organization, and for some time within CAP, was called Kawaidea. In her work on women cultural nationalists in US and CAP from 1965-1975, historian Ashley Farmer argues that women activists in these groups challenged the patriarchal

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COINTELPRO. Either way, the shootout caused tension between Baraka and Karenga, and their relationship was never the same. See: Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*.

<sup>348</sup> Peniel Joseph editor. *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 254.

ideology and adapted it to serve as a better organizing tool.<sup>349</sup> Kawaida, according to Farmer, was “patriarchal in its conceptualization of gender roles, leaving little space for African American women to theorize at its intersection with Black womanhood.”<sup>350</sup> Initial studies on cultural nationalist organizing only examined male leaders by overlooking the role of women and gender in the construction of ideologies such as Kawaida. Farmer argues Baraka has fared better than Karenga in the historical record due to his openness to editing, following the lead of his wife and other female activists in CAP, the ideology of Kawaida. Women ran the CAP restaurant, poverty programs, daycare organizations, and community initiatives, while also providing to the ideological aspects of the group.

In 1972, Baraka was elected as the national chairman of CAP, solidifying Kawaida as CAP’s official ideology. Under his leadership CAP examined and attempted to emulate Amilcar Cabral’s African Party. Farmer argues Baraka’s new role gave women increased access to leadership through his wife Amina. He credited female members with “prompting his reexamination of Kawaida gender roles, recalling that his wife ‘waged a constant struggle against [his] personal and organizational male chauvinism.’”<sup>351</sup> Revolutionary Kawaida was a new form of Kawaida practice developed by Amina and Amiri along with others where they incorporated a gendered critique of the original doctrine of the political ideology. The critiques of sexism and Baraka’s turn to Revolutionary Kawaida and eventually socialism, brought up new conflicts between members due to the new view on gender roles that can be considered progressive during its period and the adoption of socialism.

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<sup>349</sup> Ashley Farmer, “Renegotiating African Women: Women’s Cultural Nationalist Theorizing in the US Organization and the Congress of African People 1965-1975” *Black Diaspora Review*, 4:1 (Winter, 2014) 76-112. Farmer has also written extensively about women such as those in CAP and their importance to the development of both Black Power as an ideology and as a social movement. Ashley D. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017)

<sup>350</sup> Farmer, “Renegotiating African Women,” 77.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

Baraka consistently wrote on issues facing the African American community while utilizing the Marxist canon as early as 1973. His split with Karenga, the US organization, cultural nationalism, and Kawaida marked a transition into MLMT. Former CAP, RCL, and League member Michael Simanga claims Baraka's transition to Marxism was the third period of his ideological development after the transitions from Kawaida to revolutionary Kawaida. His shift to utilizing quotes from Marx and Lenin to advocate the formation of a revolutionary, Maoist party created political tension.<sup>352</sup> Baraka's speeches around imperialism, specifically U.S. exploitation of minorities in the U.S. and the Third World, as well as calling for class struggle resulted in many activists leaving the group but it also catapulted him into the national spotlight.<sup>353</sup> At a two day conference from March 31<sup>st</sup>-April 1<sup>st</sup> in 1974, Baraka gave his first public speech that elevated the "theoretical concepts of Marxism above those of African American and African theorists." This speech was given at a public program during the last evening of a two-day conference of CAP chapters, those in the process of organizing CAP chapters, and many who were supporters of CAP in the Midwest. In this speech Baraka exclaimed:

It will be a Black Liberation Party because it will be waging a National Liberation Struggle in North American and this Black Liberation Struggle is key to Socialism! It must be a Marxist influenced party in that it utilized political-economic analysis critical to capitalism to understand the system which threatens to absorb and destroy us. It must be a Leninist influenced party in that it emphasizes practice as well as theory, and the unity of theory and practice, and is committed to struggle rather than compromise. It must be a Maoist party in that it uses world revolutionary theory as well as its own people's history, and an analysis of current world conditions to create an indigenous ideology of National Liberation and Socialist Revolution.<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People*.

<sup>353</sup> This spotlight would create issues for Baraka in regards to police surveillance. Still have to write this into the narrative.

<sup>354</sup> As quoted in Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People*. "Revolutionary Party: Revolutionary Ideology," Presented to the CAP Midwest Regional Meeting in Chicago, 6.

The speech later discussed the importance of Amilcar Cabral and Nkrumahist ideologies, as well as the influence of Karenga, to create a scientific “Afrikan Socialism” that would speak to the African American community within the U.S. and connect their struggles to other movements across the world. This shift in Baraka’s thinking also created a seismic change within CAP as a national organization. Different chapters disagreed with his shift to Marxism-Leninism while others embraced it.

Baraka and some members of CAP believed black liberation was a struggle for socialism in an article in their political organ *Unity and Struggle* that reported on the actions and thoughts of the organization.<sup>355</sup> Linking capitalism and the national oppression facing societies across the globe, Baraka in the January, 1975, article argues in order for people to be freed from racism and oppression, capitalism must be destroyed. He goes on to contest, “in order to liberate black people or any other oppressed people, capitalism must be smashed and replaced with a system of public control of the means of producing, wealth, public control of the land, the factories, the machines, the mineral wealth.” The argument made by Baraka throughout the article ties the struggles of African Americans to the multinational working class that faced “super exploitation” due to the continuing division with the white working class. By applying the revolutionary science of MLMT, revolutionaries such as Baraka made similar arguments in different activist circles tying day to day struggles with the liberation movements in the U.S. and the broader global struggles of the time.

CAP articles, predominantly those written by Baraka, focused on common issues facing leftists and those attempting to apply the Marxist canon such as democratic centralism, opportunism, and what was at times called “studentism.” A major issue facing CAP and

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<sup>355</sup> Amiri Baraka, “Black Liberation is a Struggle for Socialism!!!” *Unity and Struggle*, Vol. IV, No. 2, January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1975 <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1a/baraka.htm>

organizations of the New Left and New Communist movement was applying theory into praxis, or action. Baraka in an August article titled “Against Some Bogus Types Posing as Revolutionaries” written in September, 1975, claims excessive “studentism” existed in communist circles. He writes that MLMT was “talked to death, but very little practical work is ever attempted, and people are crammed full of theories drawn from other peoples revolutions and intense beery polemic sessions.”<sup>356</sup> Balancing theory and political work applied to all of the New Communist movement organizations, but also connects to the broader twentieth century organizing strategies dating back to the first attempt at a socialist revolution in Russia. While Mao advocated for revolutionaries to work with those they sought to organize in the factories and fields, it was easy for groups to get stuck in reading circles due to engaging with complex polemics. In *What is to Be Done?*, Vladimir Lenin argues that while a communist party must go among the workers, it also requires a vanguard to study the science and theory needed to continue waging a political struggle over and over again.<sup>357</sup> Thus, the canon provided activists conflicting views that needed to be battled out in study groups, but this would take time away from actual day to day political work. Groups would have their revolutionary authenticity if they attempted to “misquote, quote out of context” or distort their grasp of the canon, so it was imperative that they were well versed in the literature.<sup>358</sup> When discussing sectarianism, Baraka advocated that socialism was failing communities such as African Americans due to the onslaught of political jargon. He writes, “besides sectarianism, i.e., academic struggles characterized by verbal overkill, there is also another aspect of Left churlishness and infantilism

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<sup>356</sup> Amiri Baraka, “Against Some Bogus Types Posing as Revolutionaries (Part I),” *Unity and Struggle*, Vol. IV, No. 12, August-September 1975 <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1a/baraka-bogus-1.htm>

<sup>357</sup> V.I. Lenin *What is to be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement* (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1961).

<sup>358</sup> Amiri Baraka, “Against Some Bogus Types Posing as Revolutionaries (Part II),” *Unity and Struggle*, Vol. IV, No. 13, October 1975 <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1a/baraka-bogus-2.htm>

that needs to be exposed.” Baraka called out the groups that utilized political jargon for the sake of sounding revolutionary, but CAP, and later the League of Revolutionary Struggle would face these similar issues.

CAP participated in electoral work since the 1972 Gary political convention. They continued this line of work in the 1976 presidential races featuring political figures such as Ronald Reagan, Gerald Ford, George Wallace and Jimmy Carter. In an October 1975 article, the author(s) claim theoretical clarity around electoral politics and their use in “building the mass movement toward socialist revolution is a must for Marxist-Leninist forces,” as claimed by Lenin in his reflections on the role of workers grappling with bourgeois parties and politics. Electoral politics is a method of putting a progressive political line to oppose the bourgeois line, to build a broad united front as a tactic for socialist revolution according to the author(s). In a later issue of *Unity and Struggle* an article poses elections for revolutionaries is “only one tactic in the struggle to win the masses and to draw them in the struggle to win the masses and to draw them into the revolutionary movement, but state power must be seized by armed struggle, by the smashing of the bourgeois state by a class war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and this revolution must be consolidated by the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.”<sup>359</sup> Tying the usage of elections in the United States by communists the author(s) tell the reader about the election of Salvador Allende in Chile.<sup>360</sup> Democratically elected as a socialist candidate, Allende was eventually forced out, and committed suicide in the presidential office on the day of a U.S. backed military coup on September 11<sup>th</sup> 1973. The author(s) claims this was his error, thinking that elections would equal a socialist revolution instead of applying

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<sup>359</sup> “Forum: Strategy 76,” *Unity and Struggle*, Vol. IV, No. 16, November 1975  
<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1a/cap-forum.htm>

<sup>360</sup> Steve Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London, 1998* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).



revolutionary theory to armed struggle to obtain state power. This was a similar thought shared with Cuban revolutionaries Ernesto “Che” Guevara and Fidel Castro. Seizing state power, not only via elections, would require utilizing the electoral tactic within the state apparatus in tandem with revolutionary theory to raise the class consciousness of all workers and not just the vanguard according to the article. CAP articles show that theory served as an important interlocutor for all types of work facing communists including political elections.

Responses from revolutionaries in the 1976 elections within CAP was the subject of a November 14<sup>th</sup> forum in New York City sponsored by the organization. Participants included Katibu of CAP, Sherman Miller of the October League (OL), and an array of others from other activist groups.<sup>361</sup> *The Call*, the political organ of the OL, summarized the forum that was hosted by CAP on their “Strategy ‘76” that was a proposal to work around “a joint, left, electoral campaign” that would provide an “opportunity for broad anti-capitalist propaganda and organizing to be carried on by the co-sponsoring anti-imperialist organizations.”<sup>362</sup> CAP favored a line that was in support of mobilizing a left electoral campaign for 1976. Katibu at the forum quoted at length from the works of Lenin on the necessity for communists not to ignore electoral politics according to the OL. Also pulling from Mao, Katibu, utilized Mao’s thesis that there are three magic weapons in a revolution: a party, an army, and a united front. He argued that a “new party” would emerge after the” building of such a united front based on the electoral campaign.” In a summation of their “strategy ‘76”, CAP explains that they failed to involve Marxist-Leninist forces in building a coalition they saw necessary for a struggle in the electoral area. Due to their failures over a year of struggle to convince other Marxist-Leninists to join, the plan was abandoned. Electoral politics would ultimately remain a priority for the League of Revolutionary

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<sup>361</sup> “Revolutionaries and the ’76 Elections,” *The Call*, Vol. 4, No. 17, December 1975  
<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1a/76-elections.htm>

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

Struggle given the long history of CAP and Amiri Baraka acknowledging the electoral sphere as necessary for activists in waging a revolutionary struggle on multiple fronts.

On February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1976 a historic conference for CAP held by the Central Committee in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania changed the organizational structure of the group. At the meeting a new organizational structure was viewed in a reflection piece by CAP as a “qualitative step in CAP’S move to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse Tung Thought, because we made some basic changes in organization structure and social practices intended to further our development as a communist organization.” This new structure included a reorganization of the Central Committee for more equitable representation as well as charging the committee to do more research and work. The committee, now tasked with more duties, would continue the “ideological and political work in major areas, i.e. Afro-American National Question, Party Building, The Woman Question, Labor Organizing, International Questions, Agitation and & Propaganda.” In line with these structural changes there were also important recommendations for “cutbacks in mass work, continuing changes in social practices, stabilization and priority on theoretical study and reduction of expenses.”<sup>363</sup> The organization made it clear that they were going to cut back on mass work that they had previously conducted such as police protests and other forms of activism to instead prioritize theoretical study, something that Baraka and others critiqued other leftists as being “studentism.”

The Central Committee Meeting in 1976 also marked a shift away from traditionalism and Kawaida Nationalism which were once central to CAP during its nationalist period. These ideologies were instituted as an oppositional aggression that accompanies imperialism, but the group could now see these concepts as “practices that support petit bourgeois ideas, separation from the masses and bourgeois nationalism.” The new plan for the organization officially

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<sup>363</sup> Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People*.

eliminated the “performing of marriage ceremonies and naming of the children by the Chairman. These practices are too cult-like and would continue presenting the Chair in a priest role and the organization as quasi-metaphysical.”<sup>364</sup> Members no longer had to use their Swahili name that they took during the cultural nationalist period of the group, along with a dropping of titles that stemmed from the Kawaida Nationalism para-military practices.

RCL’s political organ *Unity and Struggle* along with their other ephemera highlights their shift to MLM thought. Articles appeared on women’s liberation and the organizations line on the “woman question.” They lay out, like the ATM and IWK, that the woman question was a class question and a key part of the proletarian revolution.<sup>365</sup> Party building became the central task while other issues fell under the process of linking political struggles to the creation of a new vanguard communist party. Articles found in *Unity and Struggle* from 1976 to 1978 stress the need to build the party while paying attention to how historical and dialectical materialism would help them achieve this.<sup>366</sup> Also largely promoted in the newspaper and other RCL documents was their position on the national question which is a critical reason why they decided to merge with the ATM and IWK whom also had positions related to their own nationalities.

## **Conclusion**

I Wor Kuen and the Revolutionary Communist League both began as nationalist organizations that operated within their respective social movements for their particular communities. They both eventually turned to MLMT which turned off some of their original members from the group but also brought them into a sphere of political organizing in which the

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<sup>364</sup> Simanga, *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People*.

<sup>365</sup> Revolutionary Communist League, *Unity and Struggle*, Volume IV, Number 15, November Edition. Box 1, Folder 336. R. Greenwood “Third Parties” Political Periodicals Collection, 1920-2007 (SC 008) Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Washington State University Libraries, Pullman WA.

<sup>366</sup> Revolutionary Communist League, *Unity and Struggle*, Volume 6, Number 1-6, May-June Edition, 1977. Box 1, Folder 336. R. Greenwood “Third Parties” Political Periodicals Collection, 1920-2007 (SC 008) Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Washington State University Libraries, Pullman WA.

August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement was also operating. In terms of ATM and IWK, their geographic closeness in the San Francisco Bay Area meant that they would inevitably see each other in different struggles, such as the Dasco strike. This does not mean that they had to work together, but instead their commonalities around MLMT and labor organizing meant they would influence one another. In regards to CAP, which became the RCL, they were an organization with strengths mostly on the East Coast, the South, and the Midwest. Their connection to both of these groups occurred because of the national question and the position the newly formed League of Revolutionary Struggle would take upon the merger of ATM and IWK in 1978. The national question along with the fights for affirmative action plus a common history of social movement building in the New Communist movement would also result in RCL joining with the ATM and IWK to form a new multiracial communist party.

CHAPTER 5: “BUILD A NEW MULTINATIONAL MARXIST-LENINIST PARTY:” The Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle, National Question(s), and the Anti-Bakke Decision Coalition

“Chicano liberation for us would be won in the context of socialism”

-Bill Gallegos, 2018

“A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.”

- Joseph V. Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*.

Former August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement (ATM) members Ed Gallegos and Cruz Olmeda Becerra recall the importance of the Chicano national question for the organization. Gallegos believes the ATM made their mark on the Chicana/o and New Communist social movements via their understanding of the Chicano national question.<sup>367</sup> The ATM believed the “characteristics of the Chicano experience are fundamentally different from anywhere in the world. The oppression is just different.”<sup>368</sup> Although they did connect the Chicana/o experience of oppression to that of other groups in the United States and across the world they did believe that their connection to U.S. imperialism particularly in the Southwest was unique. The organization debated, argued, and wrote whether Chicana/os fit into Joseph Stalin’s five points for nationhood which consisted of: language, culture, economy, territory, and national character. The ATM would publish their position like many other New Communist movement organizations did on whether they believed if Chicana/os constituted a nation within the United States. This included a debate around how to integrate unemployed workers as well as people in the United States who were undocumented.

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<sup>367</sup> Ed Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, February 19, 2018.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

Former ATM members till this present day believe this was one of their greatest accomplishments in writing a lengthy polemic on the Chicano national question in 1976. Even at a funeral for a former member of the organization two former leaders of the ATM discussed how important their document, *Fan the Flames: A Revolutionary Position on the Chicano National Question*, was to the broader history of the global left. People have kept their edition of the publication over 40 years later and do not want to give it up, according to Becerra.<sup>369</sup>

The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, I Wor Kuen (IWK), and the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL)—the three major organizations that would go on to form the League of Revolutionary Struggle (LRS)—found common ground both in their theoretical and practical work. In particular, the organizations struggled over various ideologies related to the Marxist-Leninist Mao-Tse Tung Thought (MLMT) canon. Of great importance to each organization that emerged out of nationalist based movements was the national question.<sup>370</sup> This question had been addressed throughout the twentieth century differently for Mexican Americans/Chicana/os, Asian Americans, and African Americans. These groups attempted to keep their nationalist sentiments while organizing around the ideology of class as stressed in the writings of Karl Marx, Joseph Stalin, Vladimir Lenin, and Mao Tse-Tung. This gave the organizations a common language to be able to communicate with one another in a language that at times alienated workers and community members. They were able to critique and provide feedback on each other's theories. Only after struggling together to improve the political lines of the others could they determine if the organizations could merge.

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<sup>369</sup> Cruz Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 14, 2017.

<sup>370</sup> Specifically, they utilized Joseph Stalin's writings on the definition of a nation. He claimed that five characteristics including language, culture, economy, territory, national character See: Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*.

ATM and IWK found common ground on this in 1977 before merging in 1978, and then the League found that their ideologies were compatible with those of the RCL around the Afro American question in 1979. This chapter examines the positions of the ATM, IWK, and RCL regarding their respective national questions. This will help to analyze how the ATM wrote about the Chicano national question and how they were able to agree to be in a multinational organization with Asian Americans and African Americans. The national question was an important theoretical and practical question of the world communist movement.<sup>371</sup> The three organizations also found common ground in their fights for affirmative action as members in the Anti-Bakke Decision Coalition (ABDC) in 1977 and 1978. The Bakke court case was the result of Alan P. Bakke, who was a white male, being denied entrance on two different occasions into the University of California Davis' Medical School. He charged that he was not allowed in due to affirmative action programs that saved seats for minorities. His case went up to the Supreme Court in 1978, when they ultimately decided against his case after the California Supreme Court had sided with him. In the months leading up to the case, the ATM, IWK, RCL, and other New Communist organizations mass mobilized to build support for affirmative action. The creation of the League was in part due to this activism and close working together of the ATM and IWK and was also the result of their common understanding of the national question with one another and later the RCL.

The broader left, in particular the white left beyond just the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) throughout the twentieth century seemed hesitant to organize workers of color and took some time to address the national question as it pertained to African Americans and even longer in regards to Mexican Americans and Chicana/os in the United States. The CPUSA and

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<sup>371</sup> I Work Kuen, "The National Question and Asian Americans," 1, in I Wor Kuen, *Journal: The Political Organ of I Wor Kuen*, Number 1, August, 1974. Stanford Library Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA.

other groups first dealt with the issues facing African Americans and then only until some time after did they begin to examine the historical conditions facing Chicana/os. For example, Eugene V. Debs of the Socialist Party (SP) was sympathetic to the plight of African Americans as told by Timothy Johnson, but he argued that “since the issue of social inequality was a mere mask of the root problem of economic inequality, all social agitation on this issue was pointless.”<sup>372</sup> Debs concluded that there was “no negro question outside of the labor question—the working class struggle.” He believed that any separate agitation on racism was simply a diversion from the class struggle.<sup>373</sup> The SP did have discussions in regards to the African American question, with the most sustained taking part in 1901. This highlights a theme of many leftist groups that viewed racial oppression would be healed only after class inequality was resolved.

Harry Haywood, a prominent African American in the Communist Party USA, in the early parts of the twentieth century engaged the organization to deal with the “Negro Question.” As detailed in his memoir *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist*, Haywood participated in writing a resolution submitted to the Negro Commission of the Sixth Congress of the Communist International in 1928. For the Comintern and Haywood, the discussion as to whether or not African Americans constituted a nation in the U.S. revolved around the ideology of self-determination. This would also be why the ATM, IWK, and the RCL took up the national question. The right to self-determination for African Americans influenced the CPUSA’s political line for over 25 years. Haywood’s publication of “For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question” in 1957 would become one of the first documents organizations in the NCM analyzed in order to get a standing on the ideological debates surrounding self-

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<sup>372</sup> Timothy Johnson, “‘Death for Negro lynching!’ The Communist Party, USA’s Position on the African American Question,” *American Communist History* 7, no. 2 (2008), 244.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid*, 247.



determination and the national question.<sup>374</sup> Haywood, as members of the ATM, IWK, and RCL would do as well, applied the science of Marxism-Leninism to analyze the conditions facing African Americans in the South. He explored both the political and economic conditions of the Black Belt region. Years after the original publication of the document, Haywood would receive new life during the 1970s and 1980s when organizations made up predominantly of activist of color began writing their own polemical claims regarding how the national question applied to their own oppressed communities.

The ATM and other organizations in the NCM began the process of looking at the question regarding their own nationalities by looking at the position of the “Negro national question” and the criteria created by Joseph Stalin. The question was comprised of a series of characteristics to determine if people such as Chicana/os, Asian Americans, and African Americans were national minorities or oppressed nations that would be able to evoke self-determination. The left, to former ATM and League member Bill Gallegos, “never wanted to grapple with the significance of annexation,” and what it meant for Chicana/os in the U.S.<sup>375</sup> In particular, Gallegos felt that the white left, since it reluctantly dealt with the Black national question, did not want to deal with other questions related to Chicana/os, Indigenous or Pacific Islanders. Another Chicana/o Marxist-Leninist organization, El Centro de Acción Social Autónomo (CASA), also addressed the Chicano national question and how it applied to Chicanos and Mexicanos in the United States and in Mexico. ATM argued for the annexation of the southwest and the creation of a Chicano nation while CASA advocated for a concept of *sin fronteras*, or without borders. The two organizations disagreed on what should happen in regards to annexation but they both knew one thing was for certain—Chicana/os should have the right of

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<sup>374</sup> Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1978).

<sup>375</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

self-determination to determine the decision for themselves if they wanted to create their own nation, rejoin Mexico, or have some sort of relationship with the U.S. Both organizations, as well as the IWK and RCL in the NCM, conducted study groups based on core readings while also writing their own histories to apply Stalin's criteria for nationhood to their respective communities.

In the case of the ATM they felt that they were in the tradition of activists such as Communist Party USA member Emma Tenayuca who had written "The Mexican Question in the Southwest" with her husband Homer Brooks. Former ATM Chairman Cruz Olmeda Becerra recalls the organization originally having similar findings to Tenayuca except the fact that there was not a common economy as posed by Stalin's criteria so they had to argue for regional autonomy and not self-determination for succession.

Tenayuca and Brooks were the State Chairman and State Secretary of the Communist Party in Texas and published their piece in the March 1939 issue of *The Communist*.<sup>376</sup> The publication would be read by thousands and well into the twentieth century by people such as activists in the ATM as well as the first Chicana/o academics. They began their article with the war of the U.S. with Mexico in 1846 that led to the 1848 annexation of Mexican land to the United States. The two authors concluded that the "Spanish-speaking population of the Southwest, both the American-born and the foreign-born, are one people."<sup>377</sup> They concluded that Mexican people in the Southwest were a part of the American nation, that have not been accepted heretofore by the American bourgeoisie." It was believed by Tenayuca and Brooks that the American bourgeoisie hindered the process of national unification of the American people by

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<sup>376</sup> Emma Tenayuca and Homer Brooks, "The Mexican Question in the Southwest," in *The Communist* 18, no. 3 (March 1939).

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid*, 258.

treating the Mexican and the Spanish American as a conquered people.<sup>378</sup> They decided that Mexican people in the Southwest did not constitute a nation based on the idea that historically Mexican people in the Southwest evolved in a “series of bordering, though separated, communities, their economic life inextricably connecting them, not only with one another, but with the Anglo-American population in each of these separate Mexican communities.”<sup>379</sup> Therefore, Tenayuca and Brooks felt the economic, and political interests of Mexicans were welded to those of the Anglo-American people in the Southwest.

The power to define one’s own liberation struggle and goals after liberation would be achieved is commonly referred to as self-determination which lies at the heart of the national question. Both Lenin and Stalin said that a nation has the right of self-determination that could include secession. A close analysis of major ATM, IWK and RCL publications on the national questions related to their respective communities, highlight that race was not a secondary category to class as it was with other 20<sup>th</sup> century communist movements, organizations, and activists. Instead, these three groups found commonality in their belief that a new multinational communist party needed to be created. This party would have to continue addressing how to connect the struggles they waged in various sectors of society tied to global struggles of national self-determination for democratic and national rights.

These groups at some points defined ideas of internal colonialism to argue that a Black nation or a Chicano nation existed within the U.S. nation state. Although they all outlined their understanding of how Stalin’s five points for nationhood applied to African Americans, Chicana/os, and Asian nationals, the systematic formula was indeed flawed. This flaw, however, does not mean they should be written off, but rather it must be stressed that they attempted to tell

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<sup>378</sup> Tenayuca and Brooks, “The Mexican Question in the Southwest,” 262.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

their respective histories in relation to the rise and changes in capitalism that included imperialism. By using study guides, study questions and notes, as well as polemical pieces and oral histories regarding the three major organizations that would make-up the League, I explore how they first looked at their own national questions separately and then how they decided to form one organization based on their work in the Anti-Bakke Decision Coalition.

### **The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement and the Chicano National Question**

The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement as early as their unity conference in May 1974 established a commission to gather information on the Chicano national question.<sup>380</sup> This commission was to determine if there was a Chicano nation as related to the intellectual tradition established by the Marxist tradition as found in the Afro-American question connected most famously with Harry Haywood. The ATM did not have any university-trained researchers and many of the members either had some college, or no college experience. Many of the members were “those who the schools failed,” or also a part of the lumpen proletariat, but still forced themselves to engage with the writings of the Marxist canon.<sup>381</sup> Their initiative to study and write about the question resulted in the recruitment of new members and also led to bitter disputes with other leftist organizations including CASA.

The ATM sought advice from other established leftist organizations of color including the Black Workers Congress (BWC) and the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization around the time of their Unity Congress in May 1974. According to Bill Gallegos, the BWC had been writing on the Black national question along with the Communist League and the Revolutionary Union.<sup>382</sup> This led the organization to assert that a document related to the Chicano question needed to be addressed. Gallegos recalls that James “Jimmy Franco” was one

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<sup>380</sup> Joe Navarro interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 3, 2017.

<sup>381</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

of the main writers of *Fan the Flames* along with Bill Flores. Franco and Cruz Becerra did a lot of the speaking on the national question at forums in Albuquerque, Chicago and Denver by traveling to the locations to speak and engage with audiences that were filled with members from rival organizations where things could get heated at times. Becerra remembers activists from other organizations raising questions and criticisms at these forums.<sup>383</sup> He recalls people trying to make the ATM look bad in order to recruit people from the crowd for their respective organization. The ATM, including Becerra, recognized that they had to answer the questions on the terms of the original texts by citing Stalin or Mao to “shut everybody up” because they all worshiped the two writers.

Becerra recalls not agreeing with the original assessment posed in the writing of the Chicano national question and remembers telling Bill Gallegos who was on the Chicano national question commission that the group was looking at it all wrong. Instead, he felt the group should look to Stalin and Lenin’s writings on imperialism. They believed that Lenin’s *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* and his examination of exploitation, super profits, and the role of labor in relation to imperialism is where they should study how to change the world. Revolution, according to Lenin, would take place in the colonies of the Third World and Becerra interpreted this as “wherever capitalism was the weakest is where it would take place.”

The most core readings to the ATM became Stalin’s writings in tandem with those of Mao Tse-Tung and Vladimir Lenin to apply the writings towards the demographics of the Southwest portion of the United States since annexation in 1848 of land from Mexico via the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The group applied Stalin’s formula to the Chicano experience to examine if there was a common language, culture, territory, psychological makeup, and identity. The commission according to Becerra brought in a professor from the University of New Mexico

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<sup>383</sup> Cruz Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 14, 2017.

to do a presentation for ATM members on Chicano history from the time of annexation to about 1975.

The result of the commission findings was perhaps the most significant document published by the ATM titled *Fan the Flames: A Revolutionary Position on the Chicano National Question* in 1976.<sup>384</sup> According to former member Joe Navarro, the production of the document was “truly a collective process,” that was the result of “everybody reading everything they could, debating, and arguing.”<sup>385</sup> Ed Gallegos recalls the years studying the national question as worthwhile for him especially since he did not necessarily like study groups.<sup>386</sup> A few former members acknowledge that the final product was not agreed upon by everybody, but the overall majority did agree. *Fan the Flames* asked what the new borders of a new nation would be, thus reimagining what borders would look like. When reflecting on this Becerra felt there are two views of the national question in the document. One argument was that Stalin’s five point criteria was met and the other was a Leninist view of imperialism.

1848 was marked as the important starting point for the ATM both in *Fan the Flames* and the overall trend of how they presented the national question to audiences. They argued that after 1848, *Mexicanos* in the Southwest were not able to evolve with Mexico, or with whites in the U.S. Their psychological make up was thus different and they created unique forms of expressions as well as speaking a different kind of Spanish.<sup>387</sup> This would be a key differentiation between Mexicans born in Mexico and those in the United States.

Ed Gallegos believes many young Chicana/os had a hard time grasping the question despite being able to talk about imperialism, political economy, or the woman question but

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<sup>384</sup> August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, *Fan the Flames: A Revolutionary Position on the Chicano National Question*, Radicalism Collection, Special Collections, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI.

<sup>385</sup> Beto Flores interview by Eddie Bonilla, August 14, 2017.

<sup>386</sup> Ed Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, February 19, 2018.

<sup>387</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

people did not want to talk about if Chicana/os were a nation within a nation.<sup>388</sup> Other organizations criticized the ATM as Gallegos recalls them asking, “Who do you think you are Harry Haywood?” The ATM would say yes, “we think we stand on the same ground” as Haywood and other theoretical producers. Even the October League, who put Harry Haywood back on the map according to Gallegos by republishing his writings, did not want to deal with the Chicano national question.

*Fan the Flames* was released around 1976 and provided one of the more comprehensive positions on the national question in the twentieth century. The 70-page document was sold for \$2.50 and contained the drawing by an artist depicting a Chicano leader on horse on top of the Southwest states. The basis for the document was to examine if Chicana/os were an oppressed nationality or a nation within a nation that would then lead to Chicana/os ability to claim self-determination. Among the topics included throughout the document were overviews of Mexican and Mexican American history since 1848 and of the Chicano movement. The inside cover of the document contained Stalin’s positions on the national question from *Foundations of Leninism* where he gave a speech on the national question.

The ATM broke down their discussion of the national question via Stalin’s five points of nation hood. In segments they analyzed the boundaries of the Chicano nation, and what it meant for them to be a historically constituted community of people in relation to the rise of capitalism and imperialism. Along with these sections were others on the language of the Chicano people and the importance of the Chicano national movement. The document and the ATM were clearly influenced by the Chicano movement and even include *El Plan de Aztlán* and La Raza Unida’s “Preamble and Principles” in the appendix. Also in the appendix is the Provisional Directorate Plan de San Diego which appeared in South Texas in January 1915.

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<sup>388</sup> Ed Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, February 19, 2018.

Following the intellectual trajectory of the ATM the references of *Fan the Flames* provides insight into the studying that went into the writing of the document. Books on New Mexico, Spanish borderlands, and the Spanish in the Southwest provided the organization the basis for their discussion of the Southwest region prior to 1848. Other academic writings to appear in the document could be found from the newly established journal *Aztlán* where the articles of writers including Juan Gómez-Quiñones, Ana Nieto Gomez, Jose Limon and others were published. These were some of the first academic articles in the newly established journal which the ATM in turn used. Tied to these writings were the work of Rodolfo Acuña and his foundational 1972 text *Occupied America* and Carey McWilliams' *North From Mexico*. The two books were not only the first textbooks in Chicano studies courses but also provided the ATM with information to write their piece. Articles and books related to the Communist Party such as Emma Tenayuca's and Homer Brooks' *Mexican Question* also appear in the references. The ATM created maps and statistic charts to support their claims by using information from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

Whatever the shortcomings of *Fan the Flames* as told by Bill Gallegos, there is no denying that it made a case that looked at how national rights were involved in the struggles for Chicana/o equality.<sup>389</sup> He believes this is what they shared with CASA, the case of national rights although they defined them differently. ATM believed in self-determination but other options were possible but both CASA and ATM agreed that it was up to the people to decide. CASA internal documents show that although ATM was their rival, there was no denying what they had done for presenting a position on the Chicano national question that people had to grapple with. CASA felt they were “being attacked by some sectors” of the communist

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<sup>389</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.



movement and that all sectors were awaiting their position on the question.<sup>390</sup> They allude to the “demise of ATM” after the group went through some internal splits but acknowledged that their position was the “only widely publicized Chicano position” and that their internal issues left a vacuum in the left that they believed CASA must fill.

CASA members read the ATM’s *Fan the Flames* along with a sample leaflet that announced their national question forum to be held in San Jose. According to former leader Carlos Vazquez, CASA took “copious notes” at the forum which were taken by a “closed north American member of the organization. In particular, he wanted the commission to examine ATMs’ grasp of Mexican history, and their logic in “presenting the problematic which CASA ostensibly poses for the Communist movement.”<sup>391</sup> One task expected of a Chicano National Question Commission created within CASA became to generate a comprehensive critique of the ATM’s position.

CASA collected and analyzed, as well as attended a forum, by the ATM on the national question. In the presentation the ATM claimed they would “present its position on the development of the Chicanos from the time of annexation of the Southwest by the United States to their development as an oppressed nation within the boundaries of the US.”<sup>392</sup> In their analysis the ATM claimed they would take on the “bundhist reformist position” of CASA particularly for their position of “holding Chicano are part of the Mexican nation and their plan to build a Mexican communist party in US to play ball with the CPUSA and soviet social imperialism.”

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<sup>390</sup> “Commission on the National Question: First Meeting September 25 and 26, 1976,” box 2, folder 1, Centro de Accion Social Autonomo Papers, 1963-1978, Special Collections, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

<sup>391</sup> Carlos Vasquez to members of Commission on the National Question, “Our First Work Meeting,” September 22, 1976, box 7, folder 5, Centro de Accion Social Autonomo Papers, 1963-1978, Special Collections, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

<sup>392</sup> “August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement Presents: Forum on the Chicano National Question,” Box 25, Folder 8, Centro de Accion Social Autonomo Papers, 1963-1978, Special Collections, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

The event held on Sunday, August 29<sup>th</sup> at 7pm in the First Unitarian church on W. 8<sup>th</sup> street in Los Angeles provided childcare for participants while asking for a 1.50 donation for admittance. The presentation was followed by a discussion period.

It is clear from documents and interviews that the ATM established their position on the national question prior to that of CASA. While the ATM had a formal, and lengthy publication on the question in *Fan the Flames*, it does not seem that CASA ever established a similar type of document. Instead, CASA determined that organizing *sin fronteras* would continue being their position which shows that they believed the *Mexicano* in Mexico had similar circumstances with that of the Chicano in the United States. However, both organizations represent the two primarily Chicana/o leftist groups positions on the national question as it related to *Mexicanos* and Chicana/os whereas other organizations that wrote on the national question were from different ethnic backgrounds.

### **I Wor Kuen and The National Question and Asian Americans**

I Wor Kuen, like ATM and CASA, also addressed the national question but instead how it applied to Asian Americans. In the first theoretical journal published by IWK in August, 1974 they laid out their views on the question. The published piece in the journal is the transcript of a speech by IWK to a forum at the United Asian Community Center in New York in March, 1974. IWK first outlines in the speech the theoretical study they took up in order to then present their position on the national struggles in the U.S. The national question, as discussed by IWK, referred to the position of “Marxist-Leninists towards the question of nations and national minorities in different historical periods, and how that question is related to the working class and the overall revolutionary struggle.” In other words it is the question of how “nations and

national minorities” achieve liberation and an end to national oppression.<sup>393</sup> Throughout the speech it is clear that IWK believes the working class would be the leaders of the struggle for change.

IWK argued the national question could be divided into two areas including the rise of capitalism, and then its decline which correlated with the rise of imperialism. Both the fate of nations and national minorities were tied to the overthrow of imperialism according to the organization. They argued the national question is part of the “worldwide question of proletarian revolution” and that the struggles of oppressed nationalities had a revolutionary character. In other words, they believed that international communists had to deal with the question of race, whether in the United States or abroad, to determine the best venue for mobilization for Asian Americans and other minorities.<sup>394</sup>

The national question for IWK and other organizations of the NCM was of vital importance because it was a pivotal question that could explain the struggles of people in the U.S. with those of “other Third World people” in the world. The question allowed them to view the relationship between their struggles as Asians to those of other working people. The study of the national question enabled IWK to “clarify” what that relationship was, and how they could build towards “merging the national struggles and the struggle of the working class into one stream that will overthrow imperialism.”<sup>395</sup> Organizations including the IWK and ATM felt that oppressed nationalities formed a “crucial sector of the working class” and could begin to tie together the struggles of workers in their respective communities with those of others for the purpose of revolutionary struggle. Similar to Mao, IWK argued that in order for black people to

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<sup>393</sup> I Wor Kuen, “Revolution, the National Question and Asian Americans,” 2, in I Wor Kuen, *Journal: The Political Organ of I Wor Kuen*, Number 1, August, 1974. Stanford Library Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

win “complete emancipation” they would have to overthrow monopoly capitalism and U.S. imperialism.<sup>396</sup> These aspects of IWK would entice the RCL to find some points of unity to create a merger.

Perhaps the most important key link between IWK and other future League merging organizations was their point of view that the working class would only gain its emancipation with the elimination of national oppression. They consistently tied the struggles of workers, both based on their race and their class, to argue that unity of the working class was a necessary condition for revolution.<sup>397</sup> The national question inherently addressed the struggles for “democratic rights, against national and racial oppression and discrimination.” Democratic rights, national rights, and citizenship laid at the heart of the debates around what national minorities should do after achieving unity. IWK in the speech details that they did not begin as a Marxist-Leninist organization but rather they were a consciously revolutionary organization seeking solutions to the “roots of the problems which we face as Asian peoples.”<sup>398</sup>

The goals of IWK reveal how they attempted to integrate the national question discussions into the struggles they took up. Their priorities included the fight for democratic rights of Asians in the “communities, on campuses, and in workplaces” to link these venues into a “united front struggle against national oppression.”<sup>399</sup> By democratic rights they meant the right of “Asian nationalities, Chinese, Japanese Pilipino, and other to be able to have full and equal rights to develop as people.” This meant the full equality of language, education, and culture among other things. Along with these priorities would be the push to building a worker’s movement and contributing to building a multi-national communist party. As Marxist-Leninists

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<sup>396</sup> I Wor Kuen, “Revolution, the National Question and Asian Americans,” 5.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid, 7.

they saw that the leadership of the working class “over the democratic struggles will only be a reality when revolutionaries have deepened their roots in workplaces as well as linking it up to the struggles for democratic rights.”<sup>400</sup> Through tying the different kinds of workplaces that the IWK was organizing within such as the garment and hotel and restaurant service sectors they could build a movement by linking those struggles with others in hospitals and other sectors.

### **The Revolutionary Communist League and the Afro-American Question**

Like IWK and ATM, the Revolutionary Communist League presented positions on the national question in their newspaper, pamphlets, and in a theoretical journal format. For example, they published *The Black Nation: Position of the Revolutionary Communist League (MLM) on the Afro-American National Question* which outlined their position on the Afro-American question that others like Harry Haywood had addressed earlier in the twentieth century sometimes referred to as the “Negro question.” In this lengthy document the RCL lays out a history of African Americans in the United States from slavery to reconstruction, and then from the passing of the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> amendments to the Black Power movement.<sup>401</sup> They felt that the Afro American national question was always one of the major pivotal questions of revolutionary content among communists movements in the U.S.

The organization began their position by taking issue with how the Communist Party USA and the Socialist Party either ignored the question totally, or paid it small attention. Instead, RCL, like others before them, argued that the CPUSA and the SP ignored the question in favor of the general class question that would encompass things like race and women’s inequality.

The RCL’s definition of the black nation laid at the center of their position on the question. They considered that black people in the U.S. were “at once an oppressed nation whose

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<sup>400</sup> I Wor Kuen, “Revolution, the National Question and Asian Americans,” 8.

<sup>401</sup> Revolutionary Communist League, *The Black Nation: Position of the Revolutionary Communist League (M-L-M) on The Afro-American National Question*, undated. Stanford Library Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA.

land base is the Black Belt South, and at the same time, live as an oppressed nationality in other areas of the U.S. state in which they are found.” RCL quantified about 26 major cities outside of the South that were a part of this discussion where people were “deposited in ghetto version of the Black Belt” because they reinforced the “national character” of the lives of African Americans throughout the U.S. Black people, according to the RCL, experienced the denial of democratic rights and political control over the years since the start of the slave trade. RCL argued Black people must “demand control” over political institutions, culture, and democratic rights to obtain democratic and equal rights.<sup>402</sup>

The nation component of the Afro-American question, like it was for the ATM and IWK, stemmed from Stalin’s definitions found in *Marxism and the National Colonial Question*. More generally they agreed with Haywood that such a Black nation exists as found in his *For A Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question* that African Americans have a common territory, language, economics, and black culture. In order to support their agreement with Stalin and Haywood the RCL placed Lenin’s *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* and Marx’s *Das Kapital* in conversation with the histories of African Americans since slavery and through Reconstruction. After laying out the events which occurred during these periods the group looked at the Black Liberation Movement including the Black Panther Party and the quest for black self-determination since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>403</sup> In their discussion of 20<sup>th</sup> century black movements they explore the 1928 and 1930 Comintern documents where the CPUSA addressed the black national question. In these documents, the CPUSA recognized the black national question as a “national question and not a race question” which was revolutionary

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<sup>402</sup> Revolutionary Communist League, *The Black Nation*, 5.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid*, 5-7.

because it raised the question of power.<sup>404</sup> The Black Liberation movement for the RCL was not just a struggle against racism but rather a “struggle for Power!” This gave validity to Black Power for the RCL and is why they believed black people should not feel that Black Power was a reactionary movement.<sup>405</sup>

RCL posed seven concerns for their movement in the document in regards to what must be done to wage a successful revolution. First, the Afro-American national question must be seen as the central task of party building. Similar to IWK and ATM in the New Communist movement, RCL’s most important task was the creation of a new multinational vanguard communist party. Black people, for the RCL, were an “oppressed black nation” whose land base was the Black Belt South. This nation in point three had not been “assimilated” into the U.S. nation and they believed it could not be under capitalism. Point six in their list of concerns is that they recognized blacks in the U.S. had a special relationship to Africa. This meant they should continue doing political and mass work with propaganda and agitation around African liberation. This connection to Africa is something that began in CAP but continued well through the RCL and later the League. It stemmed from one based on the struggles against imperialism involved the Third World, who they believed was the “motor driving revolutionary around the world.” The Afro-American nation and the black proletariat were to play a key role in the “struggle against U.S. capital, along with the rest of the multinational proletariat.”<sup>406</sup>

Their last point is that their slogans must touch the “thrust for equal rights and self-determination,” but they must also seek to join the “Black Liberation Movement with the

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<sup>404</sup> Revolutionary Communist League, *The Black Nation*, 38.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid, 45.

movement for proletarian revolution. These slogans included: “Liberation for the Afro American nation in the Black Belt South,” and “Black Liberation-Socialist Revolution.”<sup>407</sup>

RCL, IWK, and ATM utilized a common Marxist canon to apply their ideologies to their daily work. Ideology—particularly around party building and the national question(s)—was only but one way they found common ground to merge their organizations. The organizations also ran in common activist circles and struggles such as around the Bakke decision or labor struggles including the Dasco Strike in Oakland. Advertisements in each other’s propaganda prior to the actual mergers show that they were in conversation with one another prior to 1978 and 1979 when the three groups became one. The three adopted their national questions and applied it to their work with students, communities, and workers in their circles and beyond as the Anti-Bakke Decision Coalition represented.

### **The Anti-Bakke Decision Coalition**

In 1977, Allan P. Bakke sued the University of California Davis for being rejected for the second time to their Medical school. The basis for Bakke’s lawsuit was that students of color with lower qualifications were admitted to the school due to affirmative action. The California courts sided with Bakke and agreed that special programs for minorities should not impact his opportunities for being admitted to the school. Essentially, it was a case around quotas and expectations on college campuses. For activists in organizations like IWK, ATM, and RCL this case represented an attack on national minorities and special programs that they believed could be linked to workplaces. The organizations participated in the Anti-Bakke Decision Coalition (ABDC) which brought together activists from the communist left, progressives, and others to fight for affirmative action. ABDC was a moment where ATM and IWK began talking and seeing more and more that they could merge to create a multinational organization and continue

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<sup>407</sup> Revolutionary Communist League, *The Black Nation*. 46-47.



party building as they argued for in their respective histories. Once they began working in the ABDC they attempted to link campus struggles with those in factories to show students and workers conditions outside of their own experiences. This section explores the importance of the ABDC for understanding the development of the League who actually continued growing support for the case after the 1978 merger. Anti-Bakke work became a struggle for democratic rights, which led ATM and IWK to give it importance.

A pamphlet released in February of 1978 presented a collection of articles from *Getting Together* on the topic of the *Bakke* decision.<sup>408</sup> *Bakke* ultimately upheld affirmative action in June of 1978 but initially was a catalyst for mass organizing across the nation while the case made its way up to the Supreme Court. Activists crossed-racial lines and advocated for more multi-national, working class organizations to mobilize communities for the struggles of equal access to higher education and the protection, and growth, of Ethnic Studies programs. They consistently tied the protests against *Bakke* with the struggles of the Third World. “Smash the Bakke Decision! Down with imperialism! End National Oppression” appears in capitalized letters on the front of the pamphlet. The collection of articles ranged from June 1977 to January 1978. Numerous organizations in various locations such as Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and Detroit participated in the National Day of Solidarity against the Bakke Decision on October 15, 1977. Protests had occurred earlier in the year at places such as the University of California Berkeley in May to fight the court case. The anti-Bakke movement united people of all nationalities in the struggles to oppose systematic oppression by targeting the courts, the U.C. regents, and labor bureaucrats the IWK argued were all representatives of the monopoly capitalist class.

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<sup>408</sup> I Wor Kuen, *Smash the Bakke Decision! Down with Imperialism! End National Oppression! Selected Articles from Getting Together*, February, 1978.  
<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1a/iwk-bakke.pdf>

The October marches and rallies culminated months of intense work that brought thousands of people to the streets to demand an end to the *Bakke* decision and national oppression. The Supreme Court would rule on the case that would determine affirmative action and special admissions. According to the IWK the demonstrations were significant in that large numbers of oppressed nationalities and students and some workers from various industries such as auto, steel, postal transportation, electronics, and others, participated.” Organizations rooted anti-Bakke struggles in workplaces, campuses, and communities to build and tie day-to-day struggles of the masses against national oppression and class exploitation. The marches demonstrated growing consciousness against the court case by groups of people beyond students that believed the source of work place exploitation and unequal access to higher education were due to the system of imperialism. Placards and banners carried slogans calling for people of all nationalities to “unite to defeat the Bakke decision, struggle to end the system of imperialism, and unite the working and oppressed peoples of the world against the two main enemies of the world’s people: the U.S. and the Soviet Union.”<sup>409</sup> The IWK believed it was important for as many forces to unite by going beyond just students and workers to also include professors, lawyers, and other social strata. Militant actions and a long-term movement were the goals of IWK in their role against the *Bakke*.

ATM and IWK participated in the October 15 March in San Francisco as shown on a flyer advertising the event. The flyer for the event states, “the oppression of black, brown, Asian, Native American, and other minority people is a systematic evil called national oppression.”<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> I Wor Kuen, “Future Direction of the Anti-Bakke Decision Struggle,” 2. in I Wor Kuen, *Smash the Bakke Decision! Down with Imperialism! End National Oppression! Selected Articles from Getting Together*, February, 1978. <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1a/iwk-bakke.pdf>

<sup>410</sup> Pamphlet, “Overturn Bakke! All Out for October 15!” 1. Political Statements: Anti-Bakke Coalition, 1978-1979 MS657 Series 3 Eric Mann Collection UMASS Amherst, Amherst, MA Eric Mann and Lian Hurst Mann Papers, 1967-2007. MS 657, Series 3 box , Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA.

ATM argued that imperialism would be smashed and replaced with socialism where the “working class and its allies like oppressed nationalities rule society and not the imperialists.” They echoed the ABDC that *Bakke* must be viewed in a broader context as a part of the revolutionary struggle. In it the organization declares that they would be participating in the ABDC event for a day of national solidarity against Bakke. They encouraged all “progressive forces and individuals to join” for a march and rally that would start at 10am on Saturday October 15<sup>th</sup>.<sup>411</sup>

In a November 1977 article IWK outlined their future tasks to deepen the mass moments so that it could grow stronger and be rooted among the masses. They wrote:

We should pay special attention to deepening our work in the multi-national working class, taking our demand to overturn the Bakke decision and defend and expand affirmative action programs to each and every factory and workplace, to the trade unions, to the rank and file caucuses, and do broad and continuous outreach, including educational leaflets and pamphlets and programs focused to the workers. This work should be aimed at building a strong rank and file movement against the Bakke decision and other instances of national oppression and class exploitation.<sup>412</sup>

IWK believed linking the anti-Bakke movement to fighting other attacks on Third World people, including the unionization of workers and the equal recognition of their languages and contracts, against deportation of immigrants, and against police brutality were vital. They also viewed the defense of Ethnic studies and against cutbacks in courses and programs could develop on college campuses if a strong student base was also reinforced. Linking *Bakke* to the struggle for women’s equality was also a priority to the IWK. They wrote, “demands such as the against the forced sterilization of Third World women, for pregnancy and other benefits for women workers, and day care for working and Third World Women.”<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> “Overturn Bakke! All Out for October 15!” 2.

<sup>412</sup> I Wor Kuen, *Smash the Bakke Decision*, 3.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

ABDC formed in February of 1977 at the University of California Berkeley, San Francisco State College, and Laney College in Oakland to educate and organize people around the *Bakke* issue on these campuses. ABDC offices could eventually be found all across the country including Chicago, Boston, Atlanta, New York, Los Angeles, Hawaii, among others. They later joined with Asian Student Unions, Black Student Union's, El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) chapters, and Third World Coalitions to form the Northern California United Students Against the Bakke Decision spanning 15 campuses in the area. Union locals of the United Automobile Workers, the United Steel Workers, and the International Allied Molders also joined the movement. These particular unions are key because they are where the ATM had maintained a presence throughout the 1970s.<sup>414</sup> The bringing together of various student groups and unions highlights a key line of the ABDC and its members that included the ATM and IWK.

The Revolutionary Communist League also wrote and discussed the importance of the Bakke Decision in their January edition of *Unity and Struggle* in 1978. In an article titled, "Bakke Case: Masses Struggle Against Decision" they highlight the events surrounding the court case. They argued that as society was speeding towards revolution, along with the disintegration of the capitalist system, "bourgeois democracy and its illusions" were intensifying. In other words, the *Bakke* case is a case in point of this. RCL juxtaposed affirmative action with slavery by saying that Medical schools like that of Davis setting aside seats for blacks and minorities was supposed to be "their way of making up for the slave trade, slavery, national oppression, and racism."<sup>415</sup> Reverse discrimination, as argued in *Bakke*, in the words of the RCL became the

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<sup>414</sup> I Wor Kuen, *Smash the Bakke Decision*, 5.

<sup>415</sup> Revolutionary Communist League, "Bakke Case: Masses Struggle Against Decision," in *Unity and Struggle*, Volume 7, Number 1, January Edition 1978, 1. Box 1, Folder 336. R. Greenwood "Third Parties" Political

“code word slogan and rallying cry of the backward elements in society to stop any mechanical attempts at sham equality.” RCL believed that the 16 “black, brown, yellow and red faces” in the freshman class at Davis “changes nothing at all in society.” They felt Bakke and his suit stressed a reactionary period of the bourgeois state weighted down by “fake liberalism of smiling jimmy.”<sup>416</sup>

RCL posed that people of color were only admitted in a special way into Medical school because of “continuous discrimination.” UC Davis, and affirmative action programs, according to the RCL were a “trick.” They argued the “real truth” was that in order to get educational institutions to represent the needs of the masses that would be oriented to teaching the masses there would have to be a change in society itself. Reforms like affirmative action in their opinion represented “fake change and actually change nothing.” They wrote, “In order to have an all around change in education,” they needed to implement a socialist system and not operate under a capitalist one.<sup>417</sup> They thus believed that small admittances into programs would not be enough but instead a greater revolution was needed to create substantive change.

All three organizations that merged to form the League in some way participated in the fights against *Bakke*. This created some form of common unity and experience that served as a basis for discussion about possibly merging organizations. An April 15<sup>th</sup> demonstration was a part of the National Spring Offensive of the ABDC that included a week of national struggle planned from May 6 to 13. ABDC locals launched a massive campaign in the “schools, oppressed nationality communities and workplaces” to smash the Bakke Decision. The National Week of Struggle, known in Spanish as the *Semana de Lucha*, included demonstrations in many

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Periodicals Collection, 1920-2007 (SC 008) Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Washington State University Libraries, Pullman WA.

<sup>416</sup> Revolutionary Communist League, “Bakke Case: Masses Struggle Against Decision,”4.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

cities on May 6-7 and a major West-coast-wide mobilization on May 13 in San Francisco. The build up to the events included many organizations like the ATM and IWK integrating anti-Bakke actions with their ongoing work against national oppression and women's inequality.<sup>418</sup> Educational events were held on Asian History in Northern California while New York students protested attempts by schools at eliminating special programs for bilingual education students. Locations like Chicago and Boston held events about Malcolm X and then linked local struggles with Bakke.

The week of struggle was to kickoff with a "weekend of massive protest" in the East, Midwest, and South portions of the U.S. on May 6-7. A militant march from the Lower East Side with a rally was being built in New York City. In the South people began planning an outdoor program in one of the housing projects in Atlanta. Chicago was also to have a citywide demonstration. Lastly, the week would culminate in a west coast mobilization in San Francisco on May 13<sup>th</sup>. All of the programs at these locations were to include speakers that would address how *Bakke* related to their "ongoing struggles," while including cultural performances, and other educational activities. All of these activities were to help root the anti-Bakke movement in the "day to day struggles of the masses against national oppression" such as for "bi-lingual education, decent low rent housing, unionization, against unemployment, and others."<sup>419</sup>

Fights against the *Bakke* decision highlight a clear understanding that communists from different movements needed to work together for the purposes of connecting struggles on college campuses facing students to those facing workers in their workplaces. Sources show that ATM and IWK were among the most prominent involved in raising the consciousness of communities to the issues of *Bakke*. Other groups like the RCL were also a part of the movement and believed

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<sup>418</sup> I Wor Kuen, "National Spring offensive to Smash Bakke Decision," 7.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid, 7.

that *Bakke* was an important cause as well. From oral history interviews with former activists they indicate that the anti-Bakke movement led to further discussions about merging their organizations. ATM and IWK would be the first to do so in 1978 after having lengthy discussions which began in 1977. RCL would join at later moments but there is still a clear distinction that ABDC work sparked this interest to merge groups. The League after the merger did not stop their ABDC work, rather they magnified it after the organization was formed.

### **“Marxist-Leninists Unite!” The Founding of the League**

The ATM and IWK decided to merge their organizations in 1978 after a period of lengthy discussion about their respective histories, political lines, and overall experiences regarding their activism based on the Marxist canon. Party building, as has been stressed throughout this dissertation, was the primary task of most New Communist movement organizations. The League of Revolutionary Struggle was one of these examples at creating a new multinational Communist Party.

The ATM and IWK first merged newspapers before formally combining their organizations. In an article announcing the morphing of the organizations the ATM members wrote, “The merger of *Revolutionary Cause* and *Getting Together* is a step in the development of this unity trend.” The ATM-IWK statement noted, “we view our growing unity within the context of the growing unity of Marxist-Leninists internationally and within the U.S. and see this as another step on the road to Marxist-Leninist unity.” This merger shows the ATM did continue to believe in “upholding the need to unite Marxist-Leninists into a single party as the central task; recognizing the revolutionary significance of the alliance of the proletariat and the

oppressed peoples; and other points of principle.”<sup>420</sup> The close working relationship between the two organizations began in 1972 but would continue until the collapse of the League in 1990. It is vital to stress the relationship between the ATM and IWK because the organizations critiqued each other’s polemical writings.

In 1977 an ATM article highlighted, “The August Twenty-Ninth Movement (M-L) and I Wor Kuen have been conducting talks for some time to forge greater unity between our two organizations. We have engaged in common work in several areas, and have achieved unity on a number of questions of principle. We are also in the process of merging our two newspapers, *Revolutionary Cause* and *Getting Together*.”<sup>421</sup> The process of merging the two organizations required that they each reflected upon their histories before unifying. Both organizations worked together in a multitude of strikes against the *Bakke* decision that banned affirmative action in 1978, and they also worked with laborers in Western Kentucky.<sup>422</sup>

In a 117-page document titled, “Statements of the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle (ML)” the newly formed organization declared the founding of the League, or *Liga* as it was sometime called in Spanish circles. They viewed this merger as a step in the advancement for the U.S. communist movement and as a further step towards unifying the “entire Marxist-Leninist movement and forging, a single unified, vanguard communist party of the U.S. proletariat.” The merger was achieved through a process of principled struggle utilizing the “Marxist method of criticism and self-criticism.” The organizations obtained unity on “all basic points of line” by discussing their views on various political positions.<sup>423</sup> In conjunction

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<sup>420</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement and I Wor Kuen “ATM-IWK Newspapers to Merge,” June 26, 1978. Last Accessed 4/25/15. *Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism*. <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1a/atm-iwk-papers.htm>

<sup>421</sup> The August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement and I Wor Kuen “ATM-IWK Newspapers to Merge.”

<sup>422</sup> The League of Revolutionary Struggle, “Statements on the Founding of The League of Revolutionary Struggle.”

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid*, 3.



with this they summarized their histories to examine the strengths, weaknesses, and errors in the activism and ideologies of their respective groups. The League in their founding document published the histories of the ATM and IWK written by each group to evaluate the negatives and positives in their Marxist development. A common understanding of each other's history was believed to serve as an "important part of forging unity" between the two organizations.<sup>424</sup>

The merger process according to the League between ATM and IWK was always marked by "smooth discussions" as well as "sharp struggle." By utilizing dialectical materialism and practicing criticism and self-criticism of the other's political line, history, and practice they would be able to move forward as one entity.<sup>425</sup> The ATM according to the document made serious errors by some of the relationships they had with certain groups in the New Communist movement in their attempts to forge a Community Party. They also made errors of "metaphysics and idealism" such as pitting mass work against the task of party building. In regards to IWK, their main error was the "narrowness" in its work which caused it not to operate as much in the Marxist-Leninist movement. The two groups examined each other's mass work and their unity was found over the course of "engaging in joint work" in various mass campaigns which included anti-Bakke work.<sup>426</sup>

Along with this they also provided their first positions on the communist movement in the U.S., the international situation, and brief positions on the national question, the woman question, and working within trade unions. The League maintained in its 1978 position that party building "maintained the central task" of the communist movement. They declared they would strive to unite the established communist groups in the movement. In regards to their

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4. <sup>424</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *Statements on the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle*,

<sup>425</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid, 9.

international line they state they believed in Chairman Mao's Theory of the Three Worlds as being a "brilliant guide for revolutionary practice."<sup>427</sup> This theory argued that the two superpowers, the U.S. and the Soviet Union, were the main enemies and forces opposing the Third World. The League believed that a victorious social revolution and the "construction of socialism, under the dictatorship of the proletariat" should be the objective of revolutionary class struggle around the domestic situation facing the proletariat in the states.<sup>428</sup> An alliance among oppressed nationalities would be needed to fight national oppression as represented in the issues such as the *Bakke* decision.<sup>429</sup>

The League right from the start of their first major document show a commitment to tying the national question to trade union and labor work. They maintained that communist organizations needed to be "rooted in factories and workplaces" and this was the most basic form of a communist group. They argued communists must take up and lead the "economic day-to-day struggles of the workers against their exploitation."<sup>430</sup> Marxists-Leninists according to the League needed to pay attention to the "national question in all trade union and labor work" to build up political consciousness of workers.<sup>431</sup> The U.S. working class is multi-national character so the task of the League was to unite the working class but also included the struggle against national oppression. League members argued that communists should also take up the struggle of non-unionized workers or the unemployed instead of just focusing on workplaces that had labor unions. The League recognized the "important and critical role" the national question had for U.S. revolution. National oppression in the United States was an "inherent feature of the

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12. <sup>427</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *Statements on the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle*,

<sup>428</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid, 16-18.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid, 19.

capitalist system,” directly tied to the “lifeblood of monopoly capitalism,” not only in 1978, but throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The “complete eradication” of national oppression would only come from the “revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie” and with the establishment of socialism.<sup>432</sup>

Also in their opening document the League maintains that the oppression of women is an “integral part of class society. The woman question was a key component of IWK which was led primarily by women. These activists struggled with the ATM around the question and forced them to struggle in regards to incorporating it within their own political line. The leadership in the League would mostly be women from the IWK including the chairperson of the organization. This remained a key line in the League as well. The emancipation of women as the League wrote would come from the elimination of class society by the socialist revolution.<sup>433</sup> Large numbers of women working were being exploited and held in low pay jobs. This struggle against the oppression of women was a “mass question” that concerned the entire working class according to the League. Communists, as stated in the document, needed to struggle for the “particular demands of women such as demands for equal pay for equal work” and this should be incorporated as a part of working class, national, and other progressive movements.<sup>434</sup>

The formation of the League marked an important moment in the history of the communist movement in the United States. The League, and I agree, had a “solid foundation to make a contribution to the revolutionary movement” since it brought together the experiences and knowledge from the ATM and IWK.<sup>435</sup> The forging of the organizations would also bring other organizations into the mix that were of great importance in their own respective

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20. <sup>432</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *Statements on the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle*,

<sup>433</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

movements and circles such as the RCL. This merger brought together activists with over 10-15 years of organizing experience within the African American, Asian American, and Chicana/o civil rights movements under one umbrella organization. This is something that was unique to the League in the New Communist movement as ATM, IWK, and RCL were leading Marxist oriented organizations within their movements.

In January 1980 the League published the third edition of their theoretical journal, *Forward: Journal of Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought*, which focused on the unification of the RCL with them. In this 160-page publication the RCL summarized their history in a similar fashion as to what the ATM and IWK did upon their initial merger.<sup>436</sup> The history of the Revolutionary Communist League as summarized by the organization extended back to the origins of the Congress of Afrikan Peoples and their work in Newark, New Jersey from 1966-1970. Following this they explored CAP's activities from 1970-1974 followed by their development as a communist organization that took up Marxism-Leninism-Maoist Thought from 1974-1979. Included in this document is "revolutionary poetry from the Black Liberation Movement" from Amiri Baraka and Michael "Pili" Humphrey who both would contribute to the League's commitment to black cultural analysis. By 1979, the RCL had joined with the League but the January, 1980 publication of the document was the first concrete history of the process before they merged.

They carried out a process of "principled struggle for unity" which integrated joint discussions on theory and practice. They practiced criticism and self-criticism to achieve unity on all major points of what would be the new political line. From the beginning of the merger process according to the groups, they had unity on the national question in the United States.

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<sup>436</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *Forward: Journal of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought*, Number 3 January 1980.

They both uphold the view that the national movements “are a powerful revolutionary force and a component part of socialist revolution.”<sup>437</sup> They also both upheld in theory and in practice the right of self-determination for the “Afro-American nation in the Black-belt South” and for the full and equal rights for “Afro-Americans in the North.” They found a point of unity surrounding the self-determination and equal rights of oppressed minorities as democratic demands that could only be won through a “revolutionary struggle for political power.”<sup>438</sup> They also similarly believed that the building of a united front within national movements and the waging of a class struggle in the national movements needed communist leadership. Also included in their unity on the national question is that they agreed there was an oppressed Chicano nation in the Southwest with the right to self-determination.

Other forms of unity included around the international situation, trade union and labor work, and the woman question. They agreed that the Communist Party of China under Chairman Hua Guofeng needed the support of those in the United States. The League and RCL also believed in the need for communists to “improve their work around the woman question.” The two organizations worked together in the Anti-Bakke Decision Coalition and on the Baraka Defense Committee which was formed to bring justice for Amiri Baraka who was beaten by the New York City Police, as well as to “generally educate and organize people against police brutality and Black national oppression.”<sup>439</sup>

This particular document indicates that in the year since the founding of the League they had begun to grow nationwide and were making important strides. The RCL at the time of their merger with the League had nearly 15 years of experience in the “Afro-American people’s

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<sup>437</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *Forward: Journal of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought*, Number 3 January 1980, 1.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

struggle for self-determination, for equal rights and against national oppression.”<sup>440</sup> Their roots in the Black Liberation movement of the 1960s reflected a similar historical trajectory of that of ATM and IWK. The merger of RCL with the League meant it would be possible for the group to broaden the scope of work and to do more to “take up the struggles of the masses, to integrate Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the U.S. revolution, and to seek unity with other Marxist-Leninists towards forging a single party.”<sup>441</sup> Upon their merger their first goal was to continue building a single, unified, vanguard communist party.

The creation of the League in 1978 with the merger of ATM and IWK marked the start of one of the more prominent communist organizations of the New Communist movement and the 1980s. When the RCL joined in 1979 this gave the League legitimacy in activist circles around the country. Activist such as Amiri Baraka and Fred Ho becoming members of the League created a cultural front that rivaled that of other groups. Rooted in the ideology of MLMT the group would continue addressing the questions facing people of color in the U.S.

The wedding of race and class in different notions of the national question pertaining to Asian Americans, Chicana/os, and African Americans resulted in them receiving criticism in the circles of their respective identity based movements. However, these groups found commonalities with organizations from other movements that highlights not only did activists lend support and solidarity to one another but they also felt that they legitimately had the ability to merge groups. Other organizations and collectives from across the country including in New York and Northern California containing Dominicans, Puerto Rican, Japanese American, White, and other racial groups as members also joined the League over time. The organization now

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<sup>440</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *Forward: Journal of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought*, Number 3 January 1980, 4.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid*, 6-7.

extended across the country during the 1980s while maintaining Marxism and socialism as their central tenants.

CHAPTER 6: The League of Revolutionary Struggle's Chicana/o and Latina/o Activism, 1978-1990

“Communism is not foreign to the Chicano movement, but a very real part of some of its most important struggles for liberation – struggles which are a major part of the revolutionary movement which will one day destroy imperialism.”<sup>442</sup>

-Gilbert Sanchez, Jr., *A Response to Union del Barrio*.

“The Chicano movement needs a communist party if it is to receive working class leadership, and to be directed towards socialism, the only real guarantee of the Chicano Nation's self-determination and equality.”<sup>443</sup>

-League of Revolutionary Struggle, *Memo Regarding Chicano Moratorium*.

The League of Revolutionary Struggle participated in the actions of the various communities their membership represented racially. This included fights for reparations among Japanese Americans, struggles in the Chinatowns, and among political movements like Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition as well as realms of activism related to denuclearization. This chapter focuses only on one component of the League's activism; their goals among the Chicano National Movement as they referred to it in internal documents. August 29<sup>th</sup> Members (ATM) merged with I Wor Kuen (IWK) in 1978 and made sure the organization continued its work in the Chicana/o communities. In particular, they paid close attention to campus struggles at various levels including at Berkeley, Stanford, California State University Los Angeles, and East Los Angeles Community College. Struggles over who would control El Movimiento Estudiantil

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<sup>442</sup> Gilbert Sanchez, Jr. for the League of Revolutionary Struggle, *A Response to Union Del Barrio* June 1985, Pg. 3 Box 20, folder 52, Carlos Muñoz papers, 1945-2015 (bulk 1969-1993), CS ARC 2016/1, Ethnic Studies Library University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>443</sup> Memo, From: District Committee, To: All Units, Regarding Chicano Moratorium April 9, 1984 pg 1 MS657 Series 3 Eric Mann Collection UMASS Amherst, Amherst, MA Eric Mann and Lian Hurst Mann Papers, 1967-2007. MS 657, Series 3 box 10, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA.



Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) and have sway in the creation and maintenance of Chicano Studies would create strong rifts in the Chicana/o movement.

The League faced challenges from rival organizations including a group from San Diego, California known as Unión del Barrio (UdB). A common theme arose around the activism of the League in the Chicana/o movement in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s around debates of self-determination. Groups like UdB and individual MEChA chapters and individuals in the state of California charged the League with overtaking organizations like MEChA and denying them the right to choose their political destinies. These debates would go back and forth with the League charging that they believed students and activists could choose for themselves if communism was applicable to the Chicana/o movement. Allegations against the League revolved around the racial make-up of the organization which included African Americans, Asian Americans, whites, and other Latina/o groups including Chicana/os.

Struggles between the communist minded members of the League and cultural nationalist organizations within the Chicana/o movement reveal a complex dynamic between internationalists and nationalists during the global Cold War. Some activists believed that the ideologies of *chicanismo*, or cultural nationalism, were not compatible with communism and that only one could have power in MEChA and the broader Chicana/o movement. Others believed that MEChA should be open for all members no matter what their political or ideological orientation. This is an antagonism that played itself out since the 1960s and 1970s in the Chicana/o movement and I argue ATM and League members were at the center and not on the fringe pushing such conversations. Scholars have largely written them off as a group of disruptors or infiltrators, which on some levels they were, but they were also key cogs in the creation and development of the movement and of major organizations like MEChA that is still

the longest lasting legacy of the Chicana/o movement that exists across the country in a variety of higher education institutions and high schools.<sup>444</sup>

Despite the League having a long history within the Chicana/o movement as shown by the participation of ATM members in organizations like La Raza Unida Party, Los Siete de la Raza, the Brown Berets, and even MEChA, their credentials and intentions were consistently questioned by organizations like UdB. The events highlighted in this chapter reveal the League consistently wrote and advocated for the issues facing the Chicana/o and Latina/o national movements. The League during the 1980s did indeed have control over some chapters of MEChA in the state of California, while in others they had influence. I explore how these debates over the League controlling chapters of MEChA bring to light the question of self-determination, as well as the role of communist or Marxist ideologies in the Chicana/o movement. Most viewed these ideologies as outside of the community yet Chicana/o members in the League utilized the ideology for their political orientation and activism. This chapter explores these struggles from the perspective of the League to give them a voice to counteract what other scholars have said about the organization.

### **Broad Overview of the League's Chicana/o Activism and Positions**

Documents produced by the League reveal their attentiveness to the issues facing Chicana/o and Latina/o communities. They uncover that the group sought to organize in various sectors including among laborers and students where Latina/os could be found. For example, a pamphlet titled, "Hasta La Victoria: Introduction the League of Revolutionary Struggle to Chicanos" highlights the work of three League activists including Bill Gallegos, Gilbert Sanchez

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<sup>444</sup> For more on the creation, development, and a brief introduction into the relationship between MEChA and the League see: Gustavo Licón, "'¡LA UNION HACE LA FUERZA!' (UNITY CREATES STRENGTH!) M.E.Ch.A. and Chicana/o Student Activism in Southern California, 1967-1999" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2009).

Jr, and Reina Diaz. The document serves to provide the faces of Chicana/o League members and details about the organization to the Chicana/o communities where the League was present. The League is described as a nationwide communist political organization, claiming it was active in “people’s movements throughout the United States” with a “special pride in our history and participation in the Chicano struggle for liberation.”<sup>445</sup> Chicana/o members of the League were a part of the Chicana/o movement since the 1960s and were among the founders of MEChA, the Brown Berets, La Raza Unida, and other organizations. They declare that during the publication of the leaflet they were active in the many “struggles of the Chicano people for political empowerment, for educational rights, for justice for the undocumented, and union representation and better living and working conditions for workers.”<sup>446</sup>

Chicano members of the League consisted of “working men and women, professionals, students, young and old.” They joined the League because the organization fighting “day in and day out” for the rights of Chicano people, from “striking cannery workers in Watsonville to tenants harassed by the INS [Immigration Naturalization Services] throughout the Southwest.” They joined because of the League’s commitment to the Chicano people’s fight for “self-determination and its dedication to fighting every aspect of injustice against Chicanos and all people suffering from discrimination and injustice.”

Bill Gallegos, who has been shown to being a founding member of the ATM after being active in other Chicana/o movement organizations, is listed as a vice chairperson of the League, editor of its newspaper *Unity*, and an essayist and poet. In his personal account found in the pamphlet he stresses how he had been active in the Chicano movement for over 17 years. At the

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<sup>445</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, “Hasta La Victoria: Introducing the League of Revolutionary Struggle to Chicanos,” Pamphlet Box 23 Folder 10 Carlos Muñoz papers, 1945-2015 (bulk 1969-1993), CS ARC 2016/1, Ethnic Studies Library University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

time that the pamphlet is written he indicates that he is active in the Latino Agenda Coalition and the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA). Gallegos claims that he became a communist because for him it explained why people “suffer today and what kind of society we need.” He helped found the League so that “Chicano people and all working people would have an organization which would never betray their interests and which would fit shoulder to shoulder with them in the barrios, the campuses, and the factories and the fields wherever there is injustice,” which indicate the group was attempting to organize in as many spheres as they could.<sup>447</sup>

Reina Diaz, described as a retired farmworker, cannery worker, and long time Chicano community activist, also details what Marxism meant for her. The mother of seven sons and daughters and grandmother of three shows that in the mid-1970s she was introduced to Marxism. The daughter of farmworkers, she and her parents worked in the fields for 25 years until she had her fourth child when she became a cannery worker. Diaz was influenced by the farmworkers struggle and the Chicano student movement mobilizations of the 1960s that predisposed her to seeing the “reality of what my life had been under this capitalist state.” Marxism, as Diaz describes, gave her a different way of looking at the struggles in her community and why “we suffered so much.” As a Chicana, she writes that she believes that the “role of the women is equal to the role of men in our movimiento” and that they must “struggle together to build a new society together.”<sup>448</sup> Diaz would become one of the main reasons why the League would get involved in a cannery workers strike in Watsonville, California highlighted in the next chapter.

Gil Sanchez, Jr., a student at East Los Angeles Community College (ELAC), claims he experienced “many injustices in society” during the years he was growing up. Born to parents

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<sup>447</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, “Hasta La Victoria.”

<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

who were workers in the factories, he saw them be thrown out because of injuries they received while working and he writes were disabled and had minimal income after working for a long period of time. Sanchez Jr. describes that he was active in the Chicano movement and in MEChA since he was a student at Lincoln High School in East Los Angeles. He became active in the MEChA at East Los Angeles Community College as well where he fought to keep the campus open. His work at ELAC highlights a vital component of the League's strategy to be at different campuses. In the pamphlet he states that some of the problems the Chicano communities were facing were as a result of the capitalist system which was denying Chicanos "equal access to higher education," and was pushing "half of our youth out of high school before they graduate."

The League impressed him because of the way people helped each other out. People could receive tutoring from members and their childcare program helped single mothers be active and return to school. For Sanchez Jr. they helped him understand that by working together and relying on each other "we can change society—that we can end capitalism—and make a better world under socialism."<sup>449</sup> Sanchez Jr. was one of the key figures in the League's student based activism. His involvement in the organization partially began because his father and family had been members of the ATM and of the League as well.

1982 internal League documents highlight the groups presence in what they called the Chicano National Movement (CNM). In a report from a meeting held on April 3 they show their process for expanding work in the CNM. The letter sent out to districts and units doing Chicano movement work included: Los Angeles, San Jose, Santa Barbara/Oxnard, Sacramento, San Francisco, and Denver, as well as a note for New York comrades doing Puerto Rican and Dominican work. Two major questions were discussed regarding the "development" of the Chicano/Latino section of *Unity*. The discussion involved representatives from every district

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<sup>449</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, "Hasta La Victoria."

doing Chicano movement work. The memo would be discussed in all units by May 21. Any comments and questions would be addressed to BG, or Bill Gallegos.<sup>450</sup>

It was decided in the meeting that Colorado, and Chicano movement work going on there, would be a concentration that required more forces to the Denver district within a year's time. Theresa Montaña, a member of the ATM and the League, along with other cadre from California moved to the area to help build the district. They would go on to organize around the fights for bilingual education in Denver as well as on the college campuses including the University of Colorado Boulder. The commission made this decision based on the overall importance of Colorado and the New Mexico area to the Chicano movement as a whole. The "land question" was most prominent in this area and it was believed to be an important consideration given the groups position on the Chicano nation, and history of land struggle in the area. They argue a leadership vacuum was missing here due to the ATM split that happened in 1977.<sup>451</sup>

Los Angeles, San Jose, and Denver were to be the districts that became the main priorities where the League would focus on their development in the CNM. Bill Gallegos transferred to the Los Angeles district by the summer of 1982 to develop the League's Chicana/o work there in a few months' time. The willingness by cadre and leadership like Gallegos and Montaña to move to new locations for the purpose of helping build something for the organization stresses a commitment beyond one's personal gains. Denver became the first

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<sup>450</sup> The box numbers for the Eric Mann and Lian Hurst Mann papers contained two different sets of numbers which created a confusing task in regards to citing a proper box number. Memo, From: SC – CNMC To: DO's and all units doing Chicano Movement Work -- LA< SJ, Ox/SB, Sac, SF, Denver, (FYI- NY, comrades doing PR and Dom work) Regarding: Report from meeting of expanded Chicano National Movement Commission, April 3, 1982, Political Statements: Chicano Moratorium 1980-1984. MS657 Series 3 Eric Mann Collection UMASS Amherst, Amherst, MA Eric Mann and Lian Hurst Mann Papers, 1967-2007. MS 657, Series 3 box, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA.

<sup>451</sup> Memo, From: SC—CNMC, Report from meeting of expanded Chicano National Movement Commission, April 3, 1982, 1.

priority in the Southwest for the transfer of cadres. According to the document three comrades from California districts volunteered to transfer to Denver within the following months. In regards to *Unity*, it was agreed that Gallegos would contribute one Chicano/Latino article per month to the newspaper. After moving to Los Angeles he would work with comrades to help generate more CNM articles from that district.<sup>452</sup>

The organization allocated resources and manpower in an effort to make the Los Angeles district a “major priority” of the overall Chicano movement work for 1984. They argued the socialist revolution needed the Chicano movement while believing the Chicano movement needed socialism. The League felt a responsibility to help give leadership to the CNM to give it a “consistently revolutionary direction” and to bring it into “class conscious alliance with working class and other progressive social movements.” The most essential requirement according to the League should be “building a communist party” because the Chicano movement needed one if it was to receive “working class leadership, and to be directed towards socialism.”<sup>453</sup> Socialism, for the League, was the only “real guarantee” of the Chicano Nation’s self-determination and equality. This is a consistent thread they took up in their polemical writings as well as organizing that they did throughout the 1980s.

### **The Struggle for Chicano Liberation and the Sunbelt Strategy**

The League and its Chicana/o members wrote articles and lengthy theoretical pieces for the political organ and theoretical journal of the organization on issues relating to Chicana/os and Latina/os after the founding of the organization in 1978. The second printing of the League’s theoretical journal, *Forward: Journal of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought*, titled, “The Struggle for Chicano Liberation” in 1979 was dedicated strictly to the Chicana/o national

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<sup>452</sup> Memo, From: SC—CNMC, Report from meeting of expanded Chicano National Movement Commission, April 3, 1982, 2.

<sup>453</sup> Memo, From: District Committee To: all Units Regarding: Chicano Moratorium April 9, 1984, 1.

movement.<sup>454</sup> At 125-pages in length, the various articles presented the League's "Resolution on the Chicano National Question," along with the history of "the Chicano people."<sup>455</sup>

The journal echoes the language and arguments posed in the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement's *Fan the Flames* produced about three years earlier. The version of Chicano history provided by the League breaks it down into the epochs tied to the Chicano and Mexicano experience in the United States starting with the events of 1848 and annexation. They then focus on Chicanos from the 1900 to the present and then the issues of Chicano people in 1979 such as that for liberation. Communism would remedy the oppression faced by Chicana/os in the U.S. that personified a second-class citizenship status. It is clear this edition of *Forward* served to introduce the organization to the Chicana/o movement after the merger of ATM and IWK. They include that the League traced its origins, in part, to the "struggle of the Chicano people for liberation."<sup>456</sup> Through their own "practical experience" they learned of the "vast revolutionary potential of the Chicano liberation struggle." For these reasons they believed if they could somehow win leadership in the struggles, as well as "build an alliance" between the Chicano national movement and the workers movement, they would be able to create societal changes.<sup>457</sup>

The League posited that no answers for organizing could be found in any book, or that there was a formula, but rather by applying MLMT would the possibilities open up for the creation of a socialist society. They believed that by applying the Marxist canon to the "actuality" of the struggles Chicanos faced and integrating those struggles with those of workers and communists would there be the possibility of Chicano liberation. "It is in that spirit, and in

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<sup>454</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle *Forward: Journal of Marxism-Leninism- Mao Zedong Thought: The Struggle for Chicano Liberation* Number 2 August 1979, Table of Contents.

<https://unityarchiveproject.org/issue/forward-number-2-august-1979/>

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *The Struggle for Chicano Liberation*, Preface.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid.



the spirit of seeking unity with all Marxist-Leninist and revolutionary activists,” that the League offered its position for the struggle for the self-determination of the Chicano nation, the struggle for a socialist United States, and the reconstruction of a new communist party.<sup>458</sup>

The Central Committee’s resolution on the Chicano national question in 1979 first appears in this journal where they argue how Chicanos developed an oppressed status in the U.S. The writer(s) of the theoretical piece begin their examination into the question with the attempted extermination of American Indians, the exploitation of African slaves, and the annexations of the Southwest from Mexico. It is within this context the League argues that people must view the development and oppression of the Chicano nation in the Southwest including its struggle for liberation. They posit that Chicano people and the working class have the common enemy and have the task of “rising up and uniting together” against the rule of the monopoly capitalist class. In order for the Chicano nation to win their fight for self-determination according to the League they would need the support of the working class because the oppression of the Chicano nation is a “pillar of U.S. imperialist power.” Imperialism, argued by the League, could not survive without oppressing nations and peoples. The fight for self-determination was therefore also one against imperialism. In order for the working class to achieve their own emancipation, it would be imperative that they support the right to self-determination among oppressed minorities.<sup>459</sup>

Chicano people, according to the League, at the time of publication had a 400-year history in the Southwest during which a nation within a nation developed. The dispossession of Chicano people cleared the way for the “complete capitalist development” of the Southwest region.<sup>460</sup> The source of the oppression of Chicano people in 1979 was the “monopoly capitalist class” and in order to end the national oppression of the working class and its allies they must

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<sup>458</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *The Struggle for Chicano Liberation*, Preface.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid, 3.

“overthrow the capitalists and replace the imperialist system with socialism.” With the power of the state in the hands of the proletariat the League argued only then could the “equality of all nationalities, including the right of self-determination for oppressed nations” solve the problems left over from old society.<sup>461</sup>

Communists, the League argued, had a long history of struggle in the Chicano national movement. Many U.S. Marxist-Leninists including those in the League developed out of the movement of the 1960s and 1970s. They, “continued to play an important role in helping to organize and lead many struggles” of the Chicano people while upholding the responsibility to fight in the day-to-day struggles the Chicano masses faced.<sup>462</sup> Communists, the League suggests, needed to take the lead in combatting narrow nationalism and chauvinism to strive to unite the struggles of Chicanos with those of others in the name of establishing socialism. In particular, they lay out that two issues facing the Chicano-Mexicano community were the killing of Chicanos by the police and the separation of families by the *migra* and Immigration Naturalization Services. They also include the fights for better health and social services, unemployment, education, and housing as things in decline for those in the communities. Also included are the struggles of Chicano students fighting for equality in education as seen by the fights against those posing arguments of reverse discrimination like the 1978 *Bakke* decision.

The majority of the rest of the document goes on to provide important historical moments in the history of the development of the Chicano nation in the Southwest. The closing of the document, however, lays out the plans and demands of the League in regards to the Chicano nation. First, they stress that as communists and internationalists they acknowledge that oppressed peoples needed to give support to one another if they were to eventually win the goal

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<sup>461</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *The Struggle for Chicano Liberation*, 7.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

that is “world communism with an end to all national boundaries and divisions.”<sup>463</sup> They also point their discussion at narrow nationalists that attack Marxism and communism as “white things.”<sup>464</sup> They argue it was imperative to develop a solution of the Chicano national question not in some “academic way, not just by reading some books and declaring what everyone already knows” like Chicanos being oppressed, but rather in a way that would take “revolution against monopolists as the starting point.”<sup>465</sup> A revolutionary program for Chicano liberation required achieving unity with others to solve the oppression facing Chicanos.

In a list of partial demands in list like form, the League believes these to be the starting point of things they would strive for in their activism beginning in 1979. Over the course of these struggles, communists would be able to “educate and organize the Chicano masses” for the struggle against the source of their oppression and for their basic national rights.<sup>466</sup> These demands included: land, full equality of the Spanish language, end of all discrimination against Chicanos in among job hiring, as well as an end to forcible repatriations of Chicanos and Mexicanos. They also called for an end to the imposition of “United States imperial culture” on Chicano people.<sup>467</sup> The last point provided by the League demands that all treaties between the United States government and the American Indian peoples of the Southwest be held and that all “land, water, timber, grazing and fishing rights of the Indian people” be respected.<sup>468</sup> The first point, however, would be the one the group argued throughout its existence. That is the “right to self-determination for the Chicano nation.” This was the League’s “basic demand” that would give Chicano peoples the right to decide if they wanted to secede from the U.S. This demand

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<sup>463</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *The Struggle for Chicano Liberation*, 95.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

meant for the League that the “Chicano people should have the right to exercise full political control over their territory.” Through the achievement of this they would be able to control their political destiny and choose that which they wanted, or in other words the right to their self-determination.<sup>469</sup>

The League’s strategy in regards to the Chicano National Movement as they referred to it did not range too far from the days of the ATM and the life cycle of the League. In the fifth edition of their theoretical journal *Forward*, Bill Gallegos, one of the spokesman of the League, laid out the group’s political line. The article titled, “The Sunbelt Strategy and Chicano Liberation” detailed the history of Chicanos in the United States echoing the national question position in the ATM’s *Fan the Flames*.<sup>470</sup> Industrialism, U.S. monopoly capitalism, and imperialism serve as the key to the discussion around the development and oppression of the Chicano nation. The future of these different elements for Gallegos laid in the “increased exploitation” of the “so-called Sunbelt – the southern and southwestern region of the country.”<sup>471</sup> For the League this meant the geographic region encompassing: North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Southern Nevada, and Southern California. This area included or was near the “territories of the African American nation in the South,” and the Chicano nation in the Southwest.<sup>472</sup>

The League after merging with the Revolutionary Communist League paid close attention to both the Chicano and African American national questions. They believed that both

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<sup>469</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *The Struggle for Chicano Liberation*, 102.

<sup>470</sup> The journal changed its name from *Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong- Thought* to instead using the moniker *Journal of Socialist Thought*. Bill Gallegos, “The Sunbelt Strategy and Chicano Liberation” in League of Revolutionary Struggle, *Forward: Journal of Socialist Thought* Number 5 Spring 1986.

<https://unityarchiveproject.org/issue/forward-number-5/>

<sup>471</sup> Gallegos, “The Sunbelt Strategy and Chicano Liberation,” 2.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

African Americans and Chicanos constituted separate oppressed nations. The African American nation occupied the Black Belt area of the south and then “Chicanos-Mexicanos” occupied a nation in a part of the southwest. Gallegos casts the phrase “Sunbelt Strategy” to refer to the “greatly increased economic and political importance of the sunbelt to the capitalists.” In other words, he shows that “much of capitalism’s ‘base of operations’” had shifted to the Sunbelt that created “tremendous implications for both the Black and Chicano liberation struggles” as well as for socialist revolution in the U.S.<sup>473</sup> These nations in historical view for Gallegos represented the “legacy of slavery and the plantation system in the South, and the military conquest of Mexico’s former territories in the Southwest.” African American and Chicano people in the area are the “heirs” to that legacy by bearing the burden of the “survivals of slavery and annexation in the form of the denial of democratic rights and the most brutal forms of national oppression” as argued by Gallegos.<sup>474</sup> In this particular article, Gallegos only focuses on the Chicano nation but argues another study on what the implications of capitalist development would be for other people needed to also be done.

Gallegos focuses on the Southwest because of its “lack of democracy” and the low rate of unionization in the area that stood around 18% of the workforce. The oppression, exploitation, and lack of rights for the Chicano nation are why the League felt they had to organize among the workers and communities.<sup>475</sup> The “increasing oppression” of people inhabiting the nation was occurring because of monopoly capitalism’s ability to exploit the labor from both the Chicano and African American nations along with other lower stratum workers.<sup>476</sup> The Chicano nation, or the nation within the U.S. nation, that Gallegos details held historical roots to the land of the

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<sup>473</sup> Gallegos, “The Sunbelt Strategy and Chicano Liberation,” 7.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid, 16.

Southwest which was annexed by the United States in 1848. According to Gallegos, this population included 15 million Chicanos, Mexicanos, and Latinos.<sup>477</sup>

The Black and Chicano nations represented the Achilles heel of U.S. imperialism for Gallegos and the League. Between them they believed the nations had the “potential, in alliance with the working class, to jeopardize the capitalists’ creaky house of cards” to influence the “tremendous super profits” and activity along the border with Mexico.<sup>478</sup> At the time of publication he believed the ground in the Southwest was “very fertile” for organizing workers, especially unorganized workers, and could serve as a key to leading the Chicano national movement on a broader scale.<sup>479</sup> The struggle for immigrant rights picked up in the 1980s and Gallegos shows that the League was also attuned to this. He writes that by organizing immigrants this had the potential to develop as a “major component” both in the labor and Chicano movements.<sup>480</sup> Lying at the heart of Gallegos’ article and the position of the line is the land question that he feels is often a forgotten part of the Chicano movement. Activists such as Reis Lopez Tijerina in New Mexico organized around land tenure struggles in the 1960s as well as the ATM in the 1970s but it remained a form of activism that was rhetorically referred to.<sup>481</sup>

The socialist revolution for Gallegos and the League would result in a powerful mass movement led by the working class in alliance with the oppressed Black and Chicano nations. He postulates that only these “critical social forces” were “powerful enough to unite all other anti-imperialist forces” and effecting the defeat of monopoly capitalism. In order for the Chicano nation to “help fulfill this destiny,” communists would have to be at the forefront as “advocates

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<sup>477</sup> Gallegos, “The Sunbelt Strategy and Chicano Liberation,” 18.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid, 22-23.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>481</sup> Tijerina was one of the most prominent figures in the Chicana/o movement who advocated for land to be returned to indigenous and Chicana/o peoples who had titles to parts of the Southwest before it was annexed to the United States.

and fighters for that nation's right to self-determination.<sup>482</sup> Here, Gallegos defines self-determination as the "right of the Chicano nation to political independence" and for the "Chicano-Mexicano people to freely choose whether they want to form an independent state, maintain the status quo, federate with Mexico, or choose some other national form, such as regional autonomy." He closes the article by claiming that communists with roots in and who work within the Chicano movement must help to link all of the "diverse aspects" of the struggle and to give it "orientation and a common focus" to help unleash its revolutionary potential.<sup>483</sup> In other words, the League believed that they must be active in the Chicano national movement and its various sectors and their goal should be to link the struggles occurring in each sector for the betterment of its revolutionary potential. This is something the League did strongly within its work with students, politicians such as Jesse Jackson, and workers including cannery workers and auto workers.

### **Debates Over Self-determination in the Chicana/o Movement**

Events between 1984-1988 reveal the League's relationship to Chicano movement groups such as Union del Barrio and El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán. The League would be at the center of debates and fights among various chapters in California of the Chicano student organization known as MEChA. Generally speaking, Northern California schools were a key for the League's Chicano movement organizing at places such as at Stanford, Berkeley, and San Francisco State University. A few campuses in Southern California also had a League contingency such as at California State Los Angeles where Theresa Montaña was active and organizing since 1977 and East Los Angeles Community College where Gilbert Sanchez Jr. was president of their MEChA chapter. MEChA was a statewide and later nationwide organization

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<sup>482</sup> Gallegos, "The Sunbelt Strategy and Chicano Liberation," 27.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid, 28.

that largely followed a cultural nationalist form of organizing across a host of college campuses at various levels including private, public, and community colleges.

Every year the organization held a statewide conference at a different host site. The events leading up to and around the 1986 statewide conference held at the University of California Berkeley are the focus of this section because they reveal the fights the League would have with other Chicana/o organizations and MEChistas, members in MEChA. Accounts of what transpired at the 1986 statewide lay at odds with what has been written about the moment from different perspectives by members of MEChA, the League, and historians due to people having conflicting accounts. What is known via archival sources is that these groups disagree about the chain of events.

One thing is for certain, the League's secrecy component in which some members weren't open communists laid at the heart of people's issues with the organization. Some people felt MEChA was being infiltrated and taken over by League members, while others claimed they had agency in their interactions with the League and that they were self-thinking individuals that could decide for themselves if they wanted a relationship with activists of the League. This bitter dispute and struggle also stresses a question of whether cultural nationalism and ideologies like Marxism both had space within MEChA and the Chicano movement. Scholars have largely indicated that students rejected the leftism of the League but documents show that some did in fact join the League with a genuine interest in communism and socialism. This section is an attempt at recreating those debates to explore what this meant for the League and the Chicana/o movement more broadly.

The conference program for the 7<sup>th</sup> National Chicano Student Conference held at Berkeley in 1986 shows a strong League presence. League members including Bill Gallegos and



Theresa Montaña along with Eva Geron and Bill Flores presented across a variety of workshops and panels. Flores, listed as the Vice Chair of the Latino Agenda Coalition, spoke on a panel on “Education and the Chicano Latino.” Montaña served as a moderator on a panel for Alianza de La Raza from Denver where she was active doing work for the League after moving there to work on the Chicano movement. Montaña also served as a moderator on K-12 education and on University/College education panels; all key aspects to her activism in the ATM, LRS, and her activist life after the League disbanded. Gallegos, listed as a corresponding secretary of the Latino Agenda Coalition, spoke on education and the Chicano/Latino Community. Gloria Betancourt served as a panelist with Dolores Huerta from the United Farm Workers on a plenary related to farmworkers. The League worked closely with Betancourt during the Watsonville Cannery Strike.<sup>484</sup>

The conference program reveals that the League members did not use their League affiliation but rather organizations that served as League fronts such as the Latino Agenda Coalition are listed as their credentials. This however does not mean that they were not members that were out as communists. Instead, these were members of the League who activists and students knew were with the communist organization because they served as spokespeople. The League limited the amount of people who could be open members as this carried a heavy responsibility and burden at the same time. These spokespeople needed to be well versed on the organization’s position which meant that many times Central Committee members like Bill Gallegos took up the responsibility. It also meant that they were the most vulnerable to red-baiting and attacks from rival organizations or police surveillance.

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<sup>484</sup> Seventh Annual National Chicano Student Conference March 14-16, 1986 University of California at Berkeley Conference program, Box 20 folder 31 Carlos Muñoz papers, 1945-2015 (bulk 1969-1993), CS ARC 2016/1, Ethnic Studies Library University of California, Berkeley.

Documents show that as early as the 1982 Statewide student conference held at California State Los Angeles the League and its members were present. An internal League document highlights Bill Flores giving the keynote at the conference and also participating on workshops as a way to raise the League's line on the Chicano national movement. They stress that they believed in "upholding the historical role of the MEChA's" and putting forward their view of "building the Chicano student movement in united front with many other movements."<sup>485</sup> The CSULA conference was hosted by the East LA Central that included CSULA, ELAC, Lincoln High school, and Franklin High school. The League planned to work within the statewide MEChA structure to try and create unity and consolidate the various chapters around a program of action against all the attacks Chicano students were facing including cutbacks, financial aid, Chicano studies, increases in tuition and other components. This sort of working within MEChA would be why the League would be charged with trying to take over the organization.

The 7<sup>th</sup> annual National Chicano Student Conference held on March 15, 1986 at Berkeley welcomed 75 schools including 600 students and community members. MEChistas from schools in San Diego, Orange County, UCLA, and Texas and New Mexico stormed the stage at the moment a prearranged signal was used and they occupied the stage during the regional report from Texas. In an "official report" of the incident released on May 16 that provided two viewpoints of the event, the writers claim that photos prove that it was not only a California MEChA action but they also coordinated with out of state MEChistas.<sup>486</sup> The group was not

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<sup>485</sup> Fall Statewide MECHA California State University, Los Angeles Conference November 11-12, 1988 Conference Program Carlos Muñoz papers, 1945-2015 (bulk 1969-1993), CS ARC 2016/1, Ethnic Studies Library University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>486</sup> "National Chicano Student Conference 1986 A Report on March 15, 1986" Sent as an attachment in a letter from MEChA at Berkeley May 16, 1986 "Regarding Report: National Chicano Student Conference 1986" University of California, Berkeley, 1. Carlos Muñoz papers, 1945-2015 (bulk 1969-1993), CS ARC 2016/1, Ethnic Studies Library University of California, Berkeley.

happy that the Northern California Central distributed a statement that read “any verbal statements, position papers, or literature attacks participating individuals or organizations will be considered disruptive to the conference.”

For the Southern California schools who organized the occupation they believed this policy made it clear that any attempt to “introduce discussion on the question of the League would be tantamount to disruptions and grounds for expulsion from the conference.” It was understood by the steering committee that the southern schools that occupied the stage attended the conference with the “primary intention” of presenting a position statement calling for the expulsion of the League from the Chicano student movement. Specifically, they were calling for the League to be banned from MEChA in the same fashion that they had previously done against the Revolutionary Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party. Out of state schools after caucusing with the Southern California MEChA chapters agreed that the policy was one of “undemocratic process” and of “regional hegemonic design.”<sup>487</sup>

While some people at Berkeley believed that the concerns against MEChA were legitimate, they felt that Berkeley was shown total disrespect after planning for 7 months and spending \$13,000. The concerns that those that took the stage held against the League ranged but were tied to the question of MEChA’s autonomy as an organization and the self-determination of the Chicana/o people. This included a concern around the loyalty of League MEChistas to the League rather than to MEChA or that League members were attempting to assume the leadership of individual MEChA chapters. They feared that League MEChistas pushed the League’s program and leaders when being in the organization to try and direct regional *centrales* and statewide taskforces. Due to the involvement of League membership in the regional central and at Berkeley, they accused these MEChA’s of being infiltrated and controlled by the League.

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<sup>487</sup> “National Chicano Student Conference 1986 A Report on March 15, 1986, 2.

However, the summary writers state “once and for all” that there were “no League members in Berkeley MEChA” and that the League possessed no control over the Berkeley MEChA.<sup>488</sup>

Berkeley MEChA according to documents took the initiative to prevent position papers as a result of hearing for months that Southern California was only attending the statewide to demonstrate against the League. A MEChA member Estella Mejia’s summation of the conference provides more information. In her piece she shows that after she was elected by Berkeley, the Central in Northern California heard about the attacks in San Diego going on regarding League affiliates and the “harassment, intimidation, and attempted trials of MEChistas” by MEChistas influenced by Union del Barrio. They also heard the comments about all of northern California MEChA being *Liga* controlled. In these rumors they heard of individuals threatening to boycott the NCS while hearing more threats of disruption. Mejia acknowledges that the League prior to the conference wanted things to go smoothly and were going to respect the rules of the conference.<sup>489</sup> On the other hand, the California State Fullerton MEChA asked for housing for a secret meeting. The tactical team attempted to talk with the San Diego MEChAs prior to the conference but they refused. Instead they took up the first rows when Texas was on stage. Then on their pre-arranged signal, “Monroe, Monroe, Monroe” over 40-50 people from San Diego, UCLA, and CSUF took over the stage. These individuals allegedly took over the stage and micro-phone” in a “military-like fashion.”<sup>490</sup>

Those who took over the stage elected three speakers, one from CSUF, UCLA, and UCSD to read a prepared statement. In this statement they declared that MEChA “is a nationalist organization” that while they respected other “Hispanics, Latinos, Mexicanos,” these people

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<sup>488</sup> “National Chicano Student Conference 1986 A Report on March 15, 1986,” 2.

<sup>489</sup> Mejia, “A Summation of the National Chicano Student Conference,” 1.

<sup>490</sup> Northern California MEChA Central, “Sum up of 1986 National Chicano Student Conference,” Adopted April 20, 1986, 4. Carlos Muñoz papers, 1945-2015 (bulk 1969-1993), CS ARC 2016/1, Ethnic Studies Library University of California, Berkeley.

should not be in MEChA because they “are not Chicano.” They pointed to a banner in the meeting hall which read “National Chicano Student Conference” and said that they objected to it because it should be called the “national MEChA conference” evoking the notion that only MEChA groups should be allowed and not other Chicano/Latino student organizations.<sup>491</sup> The NCSC had existed since 1979 as a body to unite all the “different raza student organizations nationwide.” Many in the Northern regional central believed that *Liga* was simply their “first target, or their scapegoat” and that after the communists others like Hispanics, Latinos, Democrats, and others would be next until there would be “nothing left of our raza student organizations but them.”<sup>492</sup>

The debate about “what is MEChA” arose at the November 1985 California Statewide conference at California State University Northridge and again at the March 1986 conference at Berkeley. A summary written by the Northern California MEChA central attempted to get at both positions on the question. Views from the chapters at San Diego, UCLA, Cal State Fullerton, and UCI were allegedly those responsible for disrupting the 1986 conference included a position that MEChA should take up Chicano student only and should leave other issues like “Nicaragua, and anti apartheid to the *Nica* and South African people.”<sup>493</sup> They believed MEChA should only be open to students who identified themselves as Chicano nationalists, and not “Latinos, or other raza students who called themselves Hispanic, Mexican American.” According to the document they stated that those who called themselves anything other than Chicano meant they did not know their “true identity.” They continue by stating that students who were Democrats or communists or belonged to “any other multinational group” should not be involved

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<sup>491</sup> Northern California MEChA Central, “Sum up of 1986 National Chicano Student Conference,” 4.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>493</sup> Northern California MEChA Central, “Two Views of MEChA,” 1. Carlos Muñoz papers, 1945-2015 (bulk 1969-1993), CS ARC 2016/1, Ethnic Studies Library University of California, Berkeley.

in MEChA. These things particularly pertained to the League. They believed that MEChA statewides should only be for MEChA and it would serve as the “youth wing of a vanguard nationalist organization” and that it should be militant and disciplined. Coalitional relationships should only exist if they directly benefited MEChA, according to the group.<sup>494</sup>

They argued that the League was a multinational group that had a history of disrupting and undermining MEChA’s self-determination. League documents argue the opposite for which self-determination of the Chicano nation laid at the heart of their position on the Chicano movement. Self-determination for this group of MEChistas meant the “Chicano people’s rights to have organizations and meetings exclusively for Chicanos without outside interference.” Marxism and nationalism were “opposing ideologies” for those that opposed the League and they believed that “so long as both exist” within MEChAs there could be no unity. This is why they state MEChA’s one ideology should be Chicano nationalism. They state that Chicano students who “belong to white dominated groups” were a part of the “colonial power structure” and therefore violated the “autonomy” of the Chicano movement.<sup>495</sup>

In response to the position of some of the Southern California chapters of MEChA, the Northern California Central pushed for new guidelines on how the National Chicano Student conference would be run. In it they state MEChA would be open to “all Chicano/Latino students” and that they would “support the struggles of the community, labor and other oppressed peoples. In the document they say that MEChistas came from all backgrounds including “Democrats, Republicans, communists, nationalists” and in addition members had the right to belong to any other “political, community or labor or religious organizations.” Statewide would remain open to all organizations willing to work toward achieving MEChA’s goals. They

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<sup>494</sup> Northern California MEChA Central, “Two Views of MEChA,” 2.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid, 3.

claim the group was an “autonomous student organization” and that it was not under the direction of any other political organizations, party, etc. They also encouraged and supported coalition work with other oppressed peoples by claiming, “if the cause is just- MEChA will support it.”<sup>496</sup>

According to documents from the Northern California MEChA Central, it was students affiliated with Union del Barrio and others, and not the League who disrupted the student conference “against the will” of the over 600 students present. Self-determination for this group of MEChA meant the “right of all Chicanos through Aztlán to democratically decide” their own political future. This included the League who they believed should receive judgment on “their practice” and not by “labels or rumors.” They did not consider Chicano’s or MEChistas who were not nationalists to be “outsiders or infiltrators.” MEChA should not belong to one ideology. Instead, MEChA and the Chicano movement always had different points of view and they posited that there should be respect for the diversity in both. Unity would be key as their slogan “La Union Hace la Fuerza” as the members claimed.<sup>497</sup>

In another Berkeley summation of the 1986 student conference, there are a bit more details regarding the events surrounding the stage takeover and the events leading up to and after it. A letter from five MEChistas lays the blame on Union and individuals from UCLA and Orange County MEChA’s that wanted the organization to be a certain way. UdB, frustrated with an inability to win the majority of MEChA’s over as told by the letter writers, viewed that the League had control of the National Chicano Student Conference and an earlier statewide at Northridge. They viewed those that disrupted the conference as not having respect for the Berkeley and Northern California MEChistas. The lack of respect came from the notion that

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<sup>496</sup> Northern California MEChA Central, “Two Views of MEChA,” 1.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid, 3.

these chapters could not be as “easily manipulated” or “brainwashed or manipulated” as UdB posed. These individuals claim they made their own decisions in setting up the conference in the best interest of the Chicano student movement and “our people.”<sup>498</sup> In their document they claim that most of the individuals in Berkeley were not communists but they were also not anti-communists either. They do indicate that a MEChista from San Jose City College was a member of the League and was also a member of the Northern California Central. The male had been a “constructive and contributing” MEChista even if they did not always agree. They write that they believed individuals could have their own practice and that people should be judged based on that practice. They agreed that it would be wrong to lump together all Marxist groups or “condemn one” because of the actions of another.<sup>499</sup>

This particular document adds that four members of the tactical team regarding the conference met with the League the Friday night before the conference opened. This team included the conference coordinator and League representatives made it clear that they intended to abide by the conference rules. However, the League also told the Berkeley MEChA that they would defend themselves if “slandered or attacked” at the conference. On the other hand, Union del Barrio and some of the chapters from Southern California MEChA refused to meet prior to the conference.<sup>500</sup>

Some MEChA chapters from Southern California stormed the stage and demanded to be heard. In the months and year that followed different accounts of what occurred during the conference emerged from all perspectives. At the heart of the issue was an ideological fight whether supposedly between MEChA and LRS or UdB and LRS. The fight erupted after Union

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<sup>498</sup> Estella Mejia, Co-coordinator UC Berkeley MEChA, letter and attachment, “A Summation of the National Chicano Student Conference,” 4. box 20 folder 53 Carlos Muñoz papers, 1945-2015 (bulk 1969-1993), CS ARC 2016/1, Ethnic Studies Library University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid, 6.



printed and circulated an attack on the *Liga*. Some members in MEChA's key leadership in San Diego shared Union's nationalist view and waged the struggle in MEChA's name. The position was put forward by San Diego but not all of the area claimed MEChA as a nationalist organization. Yareli Arizmendi, a writer for a document on the struggle, attended a central meeting on Thursday December 19<sup>th</sup> at the City College MEChA office. Minutes were read that basically stated "Liga would be forbidden to work in MEChA" and encouraged MEChistas to "not read the Liga's newspaper *Unity*." MEChistas were also told to not associate with anyone who was "suspected to be a member of the Liga" or anyone who associated with them. They were also told not to work with organizations that "do work or had worked with the Liga."<sup>501</sup> Arizmendi writes that there was no consultation with other chapters on this matter.

The San Diego Central of MEChA also sent a "letter of attack" to a member of both *Liga* and East Los Angeles College MEChA. MEChista Lauro Nick Pacheco was the alleged writer of the letter. ELAC MEChA responded to that letter on March 12, 1987 ELAC by addressing the issue of the "witch hunt" going on in the organization. They write that Pacheco's statement called for "hunting out" and the expulsion of different people because of their beliefs. His goal was to drive out MEChistas who supported views of the League but the ELAC chapter asks who would be next. Would that include people reading the League's newspaper *Unity*, or Protestants or others as the response claims. This "divisiveness" resulted in a vote at the 1986 Stanford statewide where more than 70 campuses voted to the MEChA guidelines that claimed people from different perspectives were to be allowed and included in the organization.<sup>502</sup>

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<sup>501</sup> Yareli Arizmendi, "Solving the Mystery Behind MEChA Central" in *Voz Fronteriza*, January 1986, 3. Box 20 Folder 36, Carlos Muñoz papers, 1945-2015 (bulk 1969-1993), CS ARC 2016/1, Ethnic Studies Library University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>502</sup> East Los Angeles College *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan* "Respect for Guidelines: Key to Moving Forward A Response to Lauro Nick Pacheco" March 12, 1987, in *La Vida Nueva* Published by ELAC MECHA Number 2 Spring 1987, 7. Carlos Muñoz papers, 1945-2015 (bulk 1969-1993), CS ARC 2016/1, Ethnic Studies Library University of California, Berkeley.

It is posed by the letter writers that they judge MEChA members and League members, as well as communists, and socialists, based on their practice. They show that they elected a communist, Sanchez Jr., as their chair. They elected him on the basis that the majority of members supported his “work and dedication to MEChA” and to “our raza.” Sanchez Jr. was active in the struggle to keep ELAC accessible to the “largest Chicano community in the Southwest, as well as in the struggle of the California communist colleges” which they indicate were under attack.<sup>503</sup> The claim by Pacheco to have people like Sanchez Jr. expelled was seen as a “violation” of the self-determination of the Chicano and MEChA community. They believed MEChistas and the rest of the Chicano movement in general should have the right to choose their own leaders, many of whom may have been communists in the past.

The original letter was sent to various newspapers of local MEChA’s signed as the co-coordinator in Berkeley in 1985-1986 such as it was sent to *Nuestra Cosa* as a letter to the editor. In it Pacheco writes that he hopes that the “problems surrounding the LRS involvement within MEChA will inspire” the reader to “question anyone who holds those principles” found in the League’s *Forward* on “The Struggle of Chicano Liberation.” He believed the League represented the “worst element” of the movement.<sup>504</sup> He goes on to call the League and its members cancerous objectives, or obstacles, while calling for the expulsion of primarily League MEChistas. In the same newspaper and another letter to the editor, Patricia Zaudio and Tomas Requji, listed as UCLA MEChistas, also speak out against the League. They state that the League had “lack of respect for MEChA and its autonomy.” They particularly called out the League’s “constant pimping” of MEChA and that the the League viewed MEChA as a “whore

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<sup>503</sup> East Los Angeles College *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan* “Respect for Guidelines: Key to Moving Forward A Response to Lauro Nick Pacheco” 7.

<sup>504</sup> Lauro Nick Pacheco, “Letter to Editor” excerpt cut out from *Nuestra Cosa*, 4 Carlos Muñoz papers, 1945-2015 (bulk 1969-1993), CS ARC 2016/1, Ethnic Studies Library University of California, Berkeley.

organization to use and abuse at their liberty.”<sup>505</sup> They pose that it is contradictory for MEChA to allow the “parasitic manipulations” of the League who so “feverently yearns to suck the blood in *nuestros trabajadores and trabajadoras.*” They continue by saying those in Aztlán needed to deal with the problem, the League, that is the “cancer eating away at our nationalist movement.”<sup>506</sup> Continuing with the cancer metaphor they argue that radiation would only prolong the League’s existence in the MEChA body and that the only solution was the “complete amputation” of the cancer that was the League.

In response to the Berkeley event and everything surrounding it the League also released a statement regarding the events of the 1986 statewide conference written by Gilbert Sanchez Jr. released in November of the same year. They did this in an effort to create unity and to clear the air to “get on with business.”<sup>507</sup> He writes like he did in other League documents that members of the League who were communists and MEChistas had been in MEChA from the “very beginning.” He writes that in the history of MEChA since 1968 there had always been communists. The League claimed that they never tried to control or take over the organization nor that they attempted to turn it into a multinational or socialist organization. Instead they pose that they supported MEChA as an “active, fighting Chicano/Latino student organization” that they saw contributed to the “struggle of the Chicano people for self-determination.” Sanchez Jr. stresses that he became a League member and a communist because it “upheld and respected the rights of the Chicano people to self-determination.”<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>505</sup> Patricia Zaudio and Tomas Requji, “Letter to Editor” excerpt cut out from *Nuestra Cosa*, 4 Carlos Muñoz papers, 1945-2015 (bulk 1969-1993), CS ARC 2016/1, Ethnic Studies Library University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>507</sup> Gilbert D. Sanchez, Jr., “Our Movement Needs Unity,” November 1986, 8. Carlos Muñoz papers, 1945-2015 (bulk 1969-1993), CS ARC 2016/1, Ethnic Studies Library University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

The League's rebuttal to the MEChA groups that wanted their ouster from MEChA and the Chicano movement was that members of the League had long been involved in the Chicano movement. Members had "long and deep roots and broad ties" to various sectors of the Chicano movement which no amount of "lies and distortions from the disruptors could hide." Members of the League did not "suddenly appear from nowhere" but instead became Marxist-Leninists in the "course of fighting for the rights of Chicano people" after being in organizations like MEChA and La Raza Unida Party. Instead, Chicano League members came to see the "need for building unity between all nationalities in this country for fighting for socialism and an end to capitalism" because in that struggle they believed a "better life" for Chicano people was possible. In order to humanize the members of the League they indicate that members included "well-known activists and leaders who are cannery workers, restaurant and hotel workers, elected union officials, janitors, farmworkers, college students, parents, teachers, lawyers, and professionals." Sanchez Jr. powerfully shows that League members were not "outsiders" but instead had a "long and proud history in the Chicano movement" that the disruptors "desperately" tried to distort.<sup>509</sup> He shows the broad reach of the League in various sectors not only related to Chicana/os but does indicate that they were playing key roles in labor work among cannery workers, restaurant and hotel workers, as well as having union leaders apart from the student work with MEChA shown here.

The League believed that the Chicano people should work with "especially other oppressed nationalities and also with the multi-national working class." They believed this strengthened the Chicano movement because of a common unity based on opposing a common enemy—capitalism and imperialism.<sup>510</sup> Sanchez Jr. proposes that as communists, League

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<sup>509</sup> Sanchez, Jr., "Our Movement Needs Unity," 9.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid, 13.

members were in Chicano work in the Chicano movement because they shared a “common desire with all Chicanos for justice, equality, political power, and self-determination.” The League as it claimed did not have a “separate agenda,” but instead had a “common desire” of the Chicano people to “end oppression and misery.”<sup>511</sup>

### **La Liga and Union del Barrio**

At the heart of the League’s fights with MEChistas was their rivalry with Union del Barrio from San Diego. The organization consistently attacked the League for their multi-racial make up to which the League argued UdB was jealous of the success the League was having in the Chicana/o movement. Polemics and hit pieces by both groups towards the other reveal more about how the League’s activism was perceived in the Chicana/o movement. The documents also give more context to the fight that would blow over on the Berkeley stage during the statewide conference.

In March of 1985, Union del Barrio and some MEChA chapters released a position paper in regards to the League. In particular, they attacked the “white left” for “jumping into Chicano struggles.”<sup>512</sup> They critiqued “international organizations” for having a “completely different idea” about the Chicano movement. They argued the actions of the left historically had produced two “very negative results” in the community as a whole. They accused the League of creating confusion among progressive Chicanos because the League hurled descriptions of people as “narrow nationalists.” UdB claimed they were a nationalist movement for liberation based on the common goal of *chicanismo*.<sup>513</sup> This attack by Union represents only a snippet of the struggles the League faced when conducting their activism in the Chicano movement. Being made up of a

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<sup>511</sup> Sanchez, Jr., “Our Movement Needs Unity,” 13.

<sup>512</sup> Union Del Barrio and members of MEChA Encuentro, “Chicano/Mexicano Toward Chicano Liberation and International Solidarity” 3/31/1985, 1 Box 20 Folder 29 Carlos Muñoz papers, 1945-2015 (bulk 1969-1993), CS ARC 2016/1, Ethnic Studies Library University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid, 3.

cadre of different racial backgrounds and maintaining an internationalist ideology based on Marxism left the League to defend its position at every realm of activism they were active in.

In 1985 the League faced the attacks from Union del Barrio for being outsiders and disrupters of the Chicana/o movement. In a July 15, 1985 response to a position paper written by UdB wrote attacking the League by Gil Sanchez Jr. he directs his commentary at how the League was fighting for Chicano liberation. In the letter it is revealed that the two organizations held a meeting to resolve their difference in June. Former member of the League's Central Committee, Roberto "Beto" Flores, recalls going to this meeting armed with guns and ready to fight UdB. The meeting did not result in a fist fight or gun fire but it reveals that the two organizations had as tense a relationship to one another the way that the ATM did with El Centro de Acción Social Autónoma in the 1970s. The League believed they had many things in common with UdB and thought they should try and work together in the "overall interests of Chicano-Mexicano people."<sup>514</sup> They felt there were a lot of saturations in UdB's statement but did feel that the Chicano movement needed the unity of all organizations which fight for "equality, justice and self-determination."

UdB's position paper against the League was released on the heels of a "several months long campaign of harassment" by UDB against San Diego MEChA's and MEChistas.<sup>515</sup> In the document the League and Sanchez Jr. claim UDB called the San Diego State University MEChA president to tell him who they, "could and couldn't invite to be keynote" for the Chicano commencement at the university. They also allegedly confronted a MEChista and tried to intimidate her from reading the League's newspaper *Unity/La Unidad*. UdB according to the

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<sup>514</sup> Gilbert Sanchez, Jr. for the League of Revolutionary, "A Response to Union Del Barrio by Struggle" June, 1985 also dated as July 15, 1985, 1 Carlos Muñoz papers, 1945-2015 (bulk 1969-1993), CS ARC 2016/1, Ethnic Studies Library University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid, 2.

League also attacked another student on the basis that she was a “friend or supporter of the League” who had attended some League activities. Union claimed they were motivated by their concern for Chicano students. They said that Chicano students were “too young and inexperienced to make an objective political judgment about communism and the LRS.” Sanchez Jr., a MEChista and member of the League, wrote that he believed it was the right of MEChistas to “democratically decide who they want to speak at their events to read whatever they want to read, and to freely associate with anyone they choose.” The League according to Sanchez Jr. also believed that it was essential to have an atmosphere in the Chicano movement in which “discussion can take place without slanders and sectarian attacks.”<sup>516</sup> The League hurled accusations at UdB for red-baiting the League whenever MEChistas did not accept their leadership.

The organization also took this moment to present their political line on the Chicana/o movement. According to UdB, nationalists as defined by them, could be the only “legitimate force” allowed to participate in *el movimiento*. They believed they were being attacked because of the influence the League did have in MEChA. Union attacked the League because it was a multinational organization and therefore it had “no right to participate in Chicano movement” and alleged the League had secret members planted in organizations to control and influence such groups like MEChA.<sup>517</sup> According to the League, UdB claimed League members were “intruders with no roots or legitimate history in the Chicano movement” yet as the League responded, members in their organization were largely a product of the Chicano struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. The League’s Chicano members were raised in the “barrios, the fields and

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<sup>516</sup> Sanchez, Jr., “A Response to Union Del Barrio by Struggle,” 2.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

around the factories where our parents still live, work, and struggle in Aztlán.”<sup>518</sup> Sanchez Jr. claims that activists who joined the League helped to draft El Plan De Santa Barbara.

The organization situated their activism in the Chicano movement based on the fact that the ATM co-founded the League in 1978. ATM, according to Sanchez Jr., was the “first communist organization in the US to fight for the right of Chicano national to self determination.” The League and the ATM were continuing a long history of “communist activism in the Chicano movement” that the League argued extended back to the events of miners in the 1920s, the Sleepy Lagoon case in the 1940s, and Emma Tenayuca leading the 1938 Pecan Shellers strike. Communism was not foreign to the Chicano movement as Sanchez Jr. argues. Instead it was a “very real part of some of its most important struggles for liberation- struggles which are a major part of the revolutionary movement” which would one day destroy imperialism.<sup>519</sup> They thus connected their communist and leftist legacy to other generations of communists including Communist Party USA member Emma Tenayuca which indicates an intellectual decision to connect themselves in a longer Latina/o leftist tradition.

Some of the attacks by UdB at the League were because the organization also contained non-Chicano members, including African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Central Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans and white members. They believed this meant the League could not “really be for Chicano self determination.”<sup>520</sup> The League countered this argument by saying it was not the composition of an organization that mattered but rather its actual position and practice in “winning political power” while upholding Chicano self-determination.<sup>521</sup> According to the League they believed the elimination of monopoly capitalism

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<sup>518</sup> Sanchez, Jr., “A Response to Union Del Barrio by Struggle,” 3.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid, 5.



and the establishment of socialism would give the Chicano nation the right to determine its destiny and would give them the right to democratically choose the future of such a nation whether as an “independent state, amalgamation, an autonomous region or a republic federated with the US or with Mexico.”<sup>522</sup> Here it is important to stress that the League’s line on the Chicano nation was still very much existent in 1985. Something they had since their inception that was established by the ATM in their *Fan the Flames* publication.

Liberation for Aztlán would come from establishing socialism but it would require an alliance between all working and oppressed peoples, according to the League. They posited that there could not be a socialist revolution without the Chicano liberation struggle, and that Aztlán could not win “real self-determination” without a socialist revolution. Thus, they pose they were trying to build a communist party to build the “conscious unity” of peoples in the U.S. As communists, they supported and worked actively for “not only Chicano liberation” but also for the liberation of “all people oppressed by imperialism” because League members were internationalists. It was thus the League’s politics and not multinational make up that UdB had issues with. UdB were nationalists who believed that *el movimiento* was solely a nationalist movement which they or another organization like them must lead. The League argued, however, that Chicanos always were members of multinational organizations including the Catholic Church and trade unions. Likewise, they claimed, nationalism was only one of the many different political philosophies of the Chicano movement that included “communism, hispanismo, trade unionism, liberation theology and others.”<sup>523</sup> It did not matter to the League which organization led the movement but rather they posed the Chicano people themselves would determine how to move forward.

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<sup>522</sup> Sanchez, Jr., “A Response to Union Del Barrio by Struggle,” 4.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.

In this piece the League also addressed their secret members in the organization. They justify this policy because of the “danger of the state (the government and its repressive forces, such as the army, the police, *la migra*).” They recognize the state for “what it is” which is an entity looking for activists, communists and revolutionaries to get their hands on.<sup>524</sup> They stressed that frame ups of people like Los Siete, deportations, and the longer legacy of J Edgar Hoover’s fights against communists is why they only had some open members. They argued UdB in red-baiting the League to reveal its full list of members were echoing Hoover and the long history of the United States opposing communists. The League finishes the document by stressing that they fought to “promote Chicano pride and identity” along with struggling for educational rights. They state they are for the “unity of our movement in our fight for our rights including the right to self-determination. They close the letter by exclaiming “Self-determination for the Chicano Nation! Viva El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán!”<sup>525</sup>

These fights between UdB and the League played out within MEChA, as shown in the statewide conference held at Berkeley. The same charges UdB hurled at the League were also used by the Southern California MEChA chapters and MEChistas that stormed the stage to argue that MEChA should only be for Chicanos and that cultural nationalism was to be their ideology. The fight over what MEChA would be was in large part a result of the League working within the organization. While it has been posed by historical actors such as those who were in MEChA and UdB that the League was infiltrating and causing issues in the organization, it is just as important to examine what the League did within MEChA that was positive. For example, they informed MEChistas about labor struggles including the Watsonville Canning Strike and the fight to keep a General Motors plant open in Van Nuys, California which are the focus of the

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<sup>524</sup> Sanchez, Jr., “A Response to Union Del Barrio by Struggle,” 5.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid, 7.

next chapter. The League, even with the faults people address towards their secret status, was successful in coordinating a united front with the students on campuses to laborers and even to electoral politics via Jesse Jackson's presidential campaigns.

CHAPTER 7: Intersecting Labor, Electoral Politics, and the Chicana/o Movement: The League and the United Automobile Workers Union, Cannery Workers, and Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition

“We are trying to build a communist party which can help build the conscious unity of all working and oppressed peoples in the US. As communists, we support and work actively for not only Chicano liberation, but the liberation of all people oppressed by imperialism- we are internationalists.”

-Gilbert Sanchez, Jr., *A Response to Union del Barrio*.

The League of Revolutionary Struggle organized in labor sectors that held high concentrations of Chicana/o and Latina/o laborers from 1978 until 1990. The League took up the battles against Reaganism and neoliberalism during the 1980s as shops were moving to other countries and situated it within their ideology of national oppression based on the national question. This chapter focuses on the labor activism of the League among autoworkers in General Motors California plants and cannery workers in Watsonville, California after exploring their general ideological approach to labor organizing. These two realms of the League's activism attempted to tie the Chicana/o movement to the struggles of workers in their workplaces. These are also struggles in which former activists of the League have written books with academic presses to share their stories.

The League maintained a presence among lower strata workers throughout its history. Although the group consisted of professionals including lawyers and professors along with college students, they maintained a political line that insisted they needed to organize workers at the point of production in the capitalist system. The organization had activists among the auto industries like those of General Motors and among cannery workers in places like Watsonville, California. This chapter explores some of the broad ideologies of the League regarding their

work in the labor industry while utilizing two brief examples of some of the major strikes and mobilizations they were apart of. In particular, I examine their work to keep the GM factory of Van Nuys open during the 1980s when runaway shops were a commonality with the rise of Reaganism and neoliberalism. The other main focus is the Watsonville Cannery strike where the organization was active also in the 1980s to fight for a better contract for workers. These two examples stress how the League, including former members of the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, continued to believe they either needed to operate within already established unions, or to work to create an alternative for workers if they were being short changed by their unions and union leaders. Each of these examples highlight how the League attempted to intersect its work with students with those of laborers. They either helped to take students to strike lines, or they used student conferences like those held by El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) to build consciousness regarding the struggles of workers such as at Watsonville. I rely heavily on two academic books published by former League activists which stresses their level of involvement and theoretical engagement with the happenings at these locations. It doubly serves to show how members who wrote for the League's newspaper learned how to be better writers which became an important skill even after they left the group or the organization disbanded. These books are an intellectual legacy of the ATM and the League.

The League approached the strikes discussed in this chapter as a part of its labor organizing that made people of color and lower strata work their priority. Watsonville, for the League, represented the “key to a rejuvenated working-class movement” in the United States.<sup>526</sup> Thus, they poured their energies into Watsonville and Van Nuys and other lower strata workers like garment shops, the auto industry, and among hotel and restaurant workers. These different

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<sup>526</sup> Peter Shapiro, *Song of the Stubborn One Thousand: The Watsonville Canning Strike, 1985-1987* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 84.

areas all had one thing in common; they were populated by Asian, Latina/o, and African American workers which could serve as a vital component of a united front approach along with politics and student movements. Watsonville and Van Nuys were places they felt practically spoke to the League's position on the Chicano national question.

Interviews with former members of the League plus internal League documents and other sources such as the books written by former members show how the organization tied together labor struggles with other realms of their activism including electoral politics. League members Eric Mann and Lian Hurst Mann were key figures in the mobilization of autoworkers since their time in the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement and continued this work with the League into the mid 1980s. Mann highlights this in his book *Taking on General Motors: A Case Study of the UAW Campaign to Keep GM Van Nuys Open* published by the Institute of Industrial Relations Publications at the University of California Los Angeles after he spent some time there as a fellow.<sup>527</sup> Peter Shapiro, a writer for the League's newspaper and served as its labor editor, recently wrote a book on the Watsonville cannery workers strike from 1985-1987 published by Haymarket Books.<sup>528</sup> During this strike figures such as Oscar Rios, a founding figure in Los Siete de La Raza and later the La Raza Workers Collective, were key figure in this struggle. He later became the mayor of Watsonville and was the first Salvador-born mayor in United States history.

The League was successful in tying together various realms of activism including labor, student, and electoral politics in a united front approach which is how I structure this chapter to stress how they organized. This chapter concludes with a brief discussion of how the League became active in Reverend Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential bid for the Democratic Party's

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<sup>527</sup> Eric Mann, *Taking on General Motors: A Case Study of the UAW Campaign to Keep GM Van Nuys Open* (Los Angeles: Institute of Industrial Relations Publications University of California, Los Angeles, 1987)

<sup>528</sup> Shapiro, *Song of the Stubborn One Thousand*.

nomination in 1983. I also show how despite Jackson losing the bid in 1984, the League continued bringing him to League functions in preparation for his 1988 run when the League was again active at the grassroots and leadership levels of his campaign.

### **The League's Approach to Labor Organizing**

The League took up the fights against plant closings, or runaway shops, that were reflective of the 1980s and the turn to neoliberalism in the United States. *Unity* covered plant closings throughout the 1980s and in 1981 the League decided to release a collection of selected articles titled, "Plant Closings and the Struggle for Job Security." In the introduction to the edited collection they state that the economic crisis of the time was the "worst attack on the U.S. working class in over a generation" that meant a "wholesale assault on workers' livelihoods." According to the League, a slump in industries like auto and steel caused plant after plant to shut down, which meant workers were being laid off by the tens of thousands, something Eric Mann and other League activists in the auto industry would experience. A mixture of exploitation by workers, union sellout leaders, and a bad economy caused the League to believe that a strong movement for job security would be needed by the working class. This movement would require the "effective organization" of rank and file workers and a "readiness to struggle" in different arenas beyond labor.<sup>529</sup>

The collection of articles in the document stressed the need for a change from capitalism to socialism. Capitalism, according to the author of one of the articles, could not be "fixed" to eliminate layoffs or plant closings because they are the "inevitable product of a system which is

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<sup>529</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, "Fighting for our livelihoods: Selected articles from *Unity* on plant closings and the struggle for job security," March 1981, 1. Eric Mann and Lian Hurst Mann Papers, 1967-2007. MS 657, Political statements 659 Series 3, Box 13, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA.

inherently unstable and anarchistic and places profits before the well-being of the people.”<sup>530</sup>

Although the bleak picture of not being able to end layoffs is posed in the article, it also calls to workers that they could strengthen their position in the long-term battle against the capitalist system responsible for the plant closings.<sup>531</sup> The fight would have to be waged on several fronts including within the unions themselves to meet the challenge of the wave of shutdowns.

Something of which the League would do years later at General Motors plant in Van Nuys, highlighting how their political line informed their activism.

One of the more intriguing articles in the edited collection written by Peter Shapiro imagines what job security would look like in a socialist United States. He writes, “For all their talk of ‘human rights,’ one right the capitalists do acknowledge is the right of a worker to earn a living.” A guaranteed job according to Shapiro is as “basic to socialism as private ownership is to capitalism.”<sup>532</sup> In the article he argues that no well run socialist economy would force its workers to overproduce goods because under socialism the workers would collectively “own the means of production: and make the economy function in their own interests.” They would make the decision about “how much to produce, where to invest, how much to charge for goods” which would insure everyone’s “basic needs” are taken care of. The crisis of overproduction would not occur. Shapiro goes on to argue that the denial of job security serves as an “integral part” of national oppression. He claims it is not by accident that “minority nationalities” are always the “last hired and first fired” under capitalism.<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>530</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, “Fighting for our livelihoods: Selected articles from Unity on plant closings and the struggle for job security,” 6.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>532</sup> Peter Shapiro, “Job security in a socialist U.S.,” in League of Revolutionary Struggle, “Fighting for our livelihoods: Selected articles from Unity on plant closings and the struggle for job security,” 20.

<sup>533</sup> Shapiro, “Job security in a socialist U.S.,” 20.



Shapiro's article and others around plant closings show the League's line against monopoly capitalism and the need to connect job security to national oppression, or in other words the national question(s), so vital to the organizations theoretical orientation. In their program on what is needed against plant closings they argue that job security should be the number one demand plus the strengthening of the trade unions. In their program against factory closings they called for the building of a "broad united front" that needed to include the full cooperation of the unions. They believed unions needed to "build coalitions with other forces hurt by plant closings" including community organizations, local governments, and small business. Also necessary would be the building of international solidarity to fight discrimination.<sup>534</sup> The League acknowledged that as internationalists they also had to look at how monopoly capitalists and imperialists oppressed the workers that entered the factories that were running away from the United States including places like the GM factories in South Africa and Levi Strauss seamstresses in Asia.<sup>535</sup> They argued these workers, like those in the U.S., faced the same enemies under the capitalist system.

The League was attuned to the broader political and economic context of organizing during Ronald Reagan's presidential term. In an interview with Roberto "Beto" Flores titled, "Labor in Reagan's USA," found in *Forward* he addressed the conditions facing the working class in 1986. These type of "interviews" served as moments of the League presenting its political line on a given subject, often times by people of the Central Committee. In his interview he addresses how labor could improve and what socialism could mean to the labor movement. Flores is described as a member of the United Steelworkers for seven years. He also served as

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<sup>534</sup> "A Program" in League of Revolutionary Struggle, "Fighting for our livelihoods: Selected articles from Unity on plant closings sand the struggle for job security," 22.

<sup>535</sup> Both Levi Strauss and General Motors were two key employers that ATM and League members worked in. Ibid, 23.

the vice president of a local of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers union.<sup>536</sup> Flores was a longtime member of the ATM and he had even served on its Central Committee and on the League's Central Committee as well.

The interview begins with asking Flores what his opinion on the present state of the labor movement was. He responded that the labor movement was facing a difficult situation regarding economic and political changes to which labor had to adjust. "Debt soaring, devouring resources, losing markets to foreign competition," and high unemployment rates are some of the things Flores touches on. In particular, he points to a changing social structure from the 1950s and 1960s. He claims an "increasingly polarized" working class with a small group of unionized workers with relatively high paying jobs on one end and the "overwhelming majority of workers with low-paying, low-security and mainly non-unionized jobs" on the other.<sup>537</sup> The election of Ronald Reagan and his siding with big business when he smashed the air traffic controller's strike early in his administration left the labor movement unprepared to deal with the offensive. Reagan helped to usher in new neoliberal policies while creating an all out attack on labor during the 1980s marked by his firing of air traffic controllers in 1981. A continuing offensive on labor did not however mean that workers sat idly by. Instead, Flores shows that signs from sectors of labor were "beginning to rally a more effective fight" including farmworkers, hotel and restaurant workers, the UAW in the auto industry, and the Hormel and Watsonville cannery workers that at the time of the publication had been striking for 15 months.

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<sup>536</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, "Labor in Reagan's U.S.A. Interview with Roberto Flores of the League of Revolutionary Struggle," in League of Revolutionary Struggle, *Forward: Journal of Socialist Thought* Volume 7, Number 1 January 1987, 53-67

<https://unityarchiveproject.org/issue/forward-volume-7-number-1-january-1987/>

<sup>537</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, "Labor in Reagan's U.S.A. Interview with Roberto Flores of the League of Revolutionary Struggle," 53-54.

These struggles were characterized by a more vigorous approach by the unions. Flores believes these unions succeeded in gaining “active support from the community” especially from “oppressed nationality movements,” and that they had a strong rank and file participation, unity, and militancy.<sup>538</sup> These movements forced top union leaders to resist Reagan’s attacks but some within the UAW and the Teamsters backed Reagan.<sup>539</sup> Others, however, like the top leadership of the Teamsters realized they had to back up the Watsonville strikers. Watsonville for the League and Flores represented an important battle that affected the lives of over 50,000 cannery workers and would have a “huge impact on the future of all Chicanos.”<sup>540</sup> These are also all places where the League was focusing its attention in California.

For Flores, the left had a responsibility to try to help workers wage struggles of national scale to preserve their unions and fight employer’s attacks. In the view of the League, the key thing which the labor movement had to realize was that “there is a powerful movement for democracy in this country, in particular by the African American and Chicano/Mexicano/Latino peoples.” This struggle for democracy, centered in the South and Southwest, had the “potential” to turn those areas from having weak unions and conservative thought to more progressive approaches.<sup>541</sup>

The League’s long time line in regards to the importance of lower stratum workers of the working class for the future of the labor movement is clear in the interview. Flores states, “We see the lower stratum of the working class playing a critical role in building the labor movement.” He clarifies that by lower stratum he is referring to “low-paid, unskilled production in basic industry, manufacturing, service and agriculture.” These were the workers that were

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<sup>538</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, “Labor in Reagan’s U.S.A. Interview with Roberto Flores of the League of Revolutionary Struggle,” 55.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid, 60.

“relatively more oppressed” and in many instances “suffered national and women’s oppression as well.”<sup>542</sup> This connection of oppressed nationality workers to the struggle for political empowerment is what Flores believes could be a form of basic democracy that could serve as a “powerful source of strength” for the entire labor movement. Labor would have to end its “exclusion, even opposition” to the demands of workers “traditionally excluded from labor, such as minority workers and women workers.”<sup>543</sup>

Within the interview Flores also addresses what the Jackson presidential campaign should mean for the labor movement. Labor, as posed by Flores, had to fight in the political arena because “so much of what goes on there” affected their interests. The union-busting of Reagan was something that showed the importance of winning offices but also showed that labor should not rely on the mainstream Democratic party only. Jackson received minimal support in 1984 from big labor in which only a handful of union locals actually endorsed him despite the fact that “thousands of workers, and many local union leaders, were not only open to Jackson’s message, but were enthusiastically supporting it.” He represented an opportunity for labor and minority communities to help combat the right and to assert a progressive political platform within the democratic party.<sup>544</sup>

The last portion of the interview addresses what socialism could mean for workers. Flores is asked what the League’s view is on the possibility of socialism ever being a “mass movement and mass force” in the United States. He responds, “Well, I’m a communist. I believe in building for a socialist society. I think a socialist US will be more just and fair for the majority of people.

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<sup>542</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, “Labor in Reagan’s U.S.A. Interview with Roberto Flores of the League of Revolutionary Struggle,” 61-62.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid.

I know that a broad, mass socialist movement can be built.”<sup>545</sup> The piece ultimately serves as an argument about how the left should, and could participate in the labor movement both by showing their practice and how dedicated they were to another possible economic system of socialism. He closes the interview by saying he believes that in the course of fighting for “every instance of injustice, many people will learn from their own experience” that socialism is not only desirable but necessary.<sup>546</sup>

A 1981 position paper by the Labor commission of the League titled “Labor and Trade Union Work” further stresses the organization’s position on labor and trade union work. In it they present their overall approach toward labor work and some of the main issues they faced. It ranges widely by covering the conditions of the working class, the strategic orientation and goals of communists working in the labor movement, and what the tasks during the period should be. They viewed labor work as one of the main spheres of “revolutionary activity among the masses” and as a “Main arena for organizing the multinational working class.”<sup>547</sup> Communist labor work for the League was in essence the question of how to organize in the factories and other workplaces and in the trade unions, to improve the immediate conditions of the workers and to build the revolutionary consciousness and organization of the working class so it can lead the struggle to “overthrow the capitalist class and establish the political rule of the proletariat.”<sup>548</sup>

Communists should aim to “unite socialism with the working class movement” according to the League to transform it to a “class conscious movement” that could lead all the classes and strata oppressed by monopoly capitalism. For the League, a strategic alliance needed to be forged

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<sup>545</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, “Labor in Reagan’s U.S.A. Interview with Roberto Flores of the League of Revolutionary Struggle,” 66.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>547</sup> Labor Commission of the Political Bureau, “Labor and Trade Union Work,” October 1981, 1. Polemic/Report: Mann, Eric “Labor and Trade Union Work” Eric Mann and Lian Hurst Mann Papers, 1967-2007. MS 657, Series 3 box , Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid, 2.

between the working class movement and the movements of the “oppressed nations and nationalities.” They were to be the core of the united front. “The national question in the United States” had a “tremendous impact on the development of the working class and the labor movement” as argued by the League because oppressed nationalities being super exploited had been and would continue to be the “major pillar of U.S. imperialisms wealth.”<sup>549</sup>

The Labor Commission indicates that work among lower stratum industry and manufacturing needed to be critical for the League and be a place to grasp and deal with the national question. Without doing this they would not be able to revolutionize the U.S. working class in their opinion. A “correct approach and line on the national question” would be needed in order to succeed in communist labor work. The tasks for the League in terms of the national question were to “organize oppressed nationality workers around the issues of discrimination” as well as “economic issues, and fighting for more representation and power within the trade unions.” The struggles and demands of minority workers needed to be a part of the trade union’s program and rank and file according to the League. They argued they needed to “Link the struggles of oppressed nationality workers on the jobs and in the unions, with the overall movements of the oppressed nationalities for democracy and political power” by building up the strength and leadership of the working class within national movements.<sup>550</sup> So for the League the national question and operating within the trade union apparatus while creating multinational caucuses and a united front with community movements were central to their labor political line. Newspaper discussions and Marxist study groups sponsored by communist organizations in raising consciousness and building political unity would also be a part of the united front in the

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<sup>549</sup> Labor Commission of the Political Bureau, “Labor and Trade Union Work,” 2.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid, 14.

labor movement and would be utilized in both their campaigns in the auto industry and among cannery workers.<sup>551</sup>

### **The League and the United Automobile Workers**

The League maintained a steady presence in the auto industry due to the ATM having had prior experience in about ten different auto factories across the country. They were especially rooted in California auto plants. In a letter on March 12, 1979, they detailed how they were attempting to build a network for workers in the United Auto Workers Union and highlight where the organization had a cadre or sympathizers. They indicate that they worked in Detroit and had people in two plants, one with Chrysler and one with Ford. Some of the people they met in Detroit were actually folks they reconnected with after the ATM had attended the 1977 UAW national convention. The League indicates that two people read *Unity* with the members and had a regular relationship with the activists. They also show that they participated in caucuses in plants in Chicago where Ex-ATM members had been established.<sup>552</sup>

The League had their longest history and strongest basis among California autoworkers, according to the same internal memo. Former ATM and League members like Eric and Lian Mann found themselves organizing in various auto factories in both Northern and Southern California in which they worked since their days in the ATM. The most significant actions the League was involved in occurred in Van Nuys, California during the 1980s, but they also had cadre in other locations throughout the state. In a short summary of plant work they indicate that they were in at least four plants for different periods of time. For example, in what they call plant number 4—a site which had 4,000 workers—they claim they had been working for over a year

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<sup>551</sup> Labor Commission of the Political Bureau, “Labor and Trade Union Work,” 17-18.

<sup>552</sup> Memo From: SC-LC To: DC, Labor Section Committee, and All Cadre in Auto Regarding Carrying out the National Auto Plan March 12, 1979, 1-17. Political Statements: National Auto Plan: Eric Mann and Lian Hurst Mann Papers, 1967-2007. MS 657, Series 3 box 15, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA.

after establishing themselves as “fighters and organizers.” They sold *Unity* in the plant which was an achievement at a few of the other locations.<sup>553</sup> In some of the plants they had been working for as long as three years which would have been ATM cadre. Things such as working for better working conditions, better pay, the treatment of languages equally, and raising the political consciousness of workers were goals at the locations.

In the years leading up to 1985 the League and activists like Eric Mann participated in the UAW throughout the country but most centrally in California. In the fall of 1985, Mann received a position with the Center for Labor Research and Education Institute of Industrial Relations at the University of California, Los Angeles. He had been working and organizing as a League member at the General Motors plant in Van Nuys as a night shift-employee and an active member of the UAW Local 645. In the forward to a monograph written by Mann, Geraldine Leshin, the Assistant Director for Labor Research and Education at UCLA writes that Mann “sought time away from his night shift work at the plant” because he wanted to study the history of General Motors and its relationship to the unions. By the time Mann became a fellow at the Center for Labor Research he had left the League over disputes largely stemming from his work to keep the GM Van Nuys plant open. His book serves as an intellectual and institutional history of GM and its plants in the attempts to understand plant closures and the eroding of the U.S.’ industrial base.<sup>554</sup>

Eric Mann entered the auto industry through a hiring incentive policy for spouses after his wife Lian had been working for Ford Milpitas in Northern California.<sup>555</sup> The two organized in different plant factories and worked in both Northern and Southern California including

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<sup>553</sup> Memo From: SC-LC To: DC, Labor Section Committee, and All Cadre in Auto Regarding Carrying out the National Auto Plan, 8.

<sup>554</sup> Geraldine Leshin, Forward to Mann, *Taking on General Motors*, ix.

<sup>555</sup> Eric Mann Interview by Eddie Bonilla, May 2, 2018.



Milpitas, Fremont, South Gate, and Van Nuys. In 1978, according to Mann, the California industry was one of the “largest centers of production outside of Detroit” due to its six assembly plants that employed almost 25,000 workers at its peak production. GM, Ford, and Mack truck employed the most workers and the complaint those workers had was “stopping all the damn overtime.” Mann shows in his research and writing that by 1979 OPEC prices increased which caused a “major structural crisis” that impacted the auto industry with California being hit the hardest.<sup>556</sup> By January 1980, Ford announced the closing of its Pico Rivera plant in the outskirts of Los Angeles, causing 2,500 workers to be laid off within two weeks time. In the following two years Mack Truck closed its only West Coast plant in Hayward and Ford later closed its plant in Milpitas. Other plant closures such as at the GM South Gate plant where Mann worked in the early 1980s resulted in over 11,000 workers losing their jobs. Mann shows that “seemingly overnight” the GM plant in Van Nuys was the last plant west of Oklahoma City.<sup>557</sup>

Mann’s monograph and narrative centers around the struggle to keep GM Van Nuys open amidst the closures and runaway auto industry plants in the early to mid 1980s, a phenomenon that the League outlined in its own documents. The plant opened in 1947 in what is called the valley of Los Angeles. The workforce was primarily white as Mann shows but upon the closure of the GM South Gate plant, many Black workers transferred to Van Nuys which raised the African American population. Many of the workers lived in the South Central area of Los Angeles. Mann indicates that the racial dynamics of the plant are critical for understanding the development of the activism within the plant. The League sought to connect the labor struggle with student struggles on college campuses by trying to pose them as issues around the national question. They did this by indicating the exploitation of Chicana/o workers in the Sunbelt as

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<sup>556</sup> Mann, *Taking on General Motors*, 97.

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

described by Gallegos was rooted in national oppression. The plants workforce was 50% Latino and 15% black and required that in order to stop the plant closure they would have to reach out to the Latino and Black communities. This would be a crucial element in the strategy the League and the union developed to save the plant.<sup>558</sup>

In 1982, according to Mann, there was only a small group of activists within Local 645 in Van Nuys that began to strategize about what it would take to keep the plant open. The President of the Local was Pete Beltran, who helped to establish a Community Action Program Committee. Eric Mann and other key people like Mike Gomez and Mark Masaoka served on the committee. Beltran was a Chicano that had been elected president of the local in 1978 which corresponded to Chicano's being the "largest single ethnic group in the plant."<sup>559</sup> Mann moved to the Van Nuys plant in 1982 after working and being laid off nearby at the South Gate plant. He helped to connect the struggle at Van Nuys with MEChA and key figures in the Chicana/o movement like Rodolfo Acuña, a professor at California State University Northridge. MEChA spokespeople emphasized during the movement that many of their parents worked at the plant which made this a Chicano issue.<sup>560</sup>

Mann provides a detailed account in his monograph about the day to day struggles for organizing to keep the plant open. A question of redbaiting arose throughout the struggle and deserves attention in order to highlight the context for what League activists dealt with on the shop floors or among other kinds of laborers. Mann, being a League affiliate, became the subject of leaflets that raised "a series of unsubstantiated and personal attacks" against him and Pete Beltran.<sup>561</sup> Mann shows that red-baiters tried to provoke fist fights and would ask people if they

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<sup>558</sup> Mann, *Taking on General Motors*, 98-99.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid, 232.

were communists or if they “knew they were being used by communists.”<sup>562</sup> These events were emblematic of the attacks communists faced during McCarthyism and stress how factories operated as reproductions of society as Kevin Boyle shows in his article regarding race and gender in a 1950s auto factory in Michigan.<sup>563</sup>

Workers in the UAW local asked themselves how to respond to the socialist and communist groups that sold their newspapers or leafleted at rallies according to Mann. Some argued that the local should not allow any groups to sell their ephemera at all because it would associate the campaign with “socialism and communism and turn off any of the campaign’s supporters.” Others, however, asserted that the groups had the “rights of freedom of speech and press” but that the campaign should have nothing to do with them. They ultimately decided to restrict the activities of the groups to the sidewalk which was public property. There were some workers who saw nothing wrong with reading socialist or communist newspapers like *Unity* but still it was decided that only the union itself could leaflet in its union hall and parking lot.<sup>564</sup> Rumors spread after this discussion about what to do about the communists and those who were affiliated or sympathetic to letting these groups sell their propaganda. This group proposed that the 25 most active leaders of the Campaign to Keep Van Nuys Open admit to whether they were “socialists, communists, or ‘Americans’.” The McCarthy like tactics had a destructive impact on the campaign because some workers who had no experience with these attacks did not know how to handle them. Other seasoned activists like Mann with movement backgrounds and with interest in socialist ideas had experienced these things and were better prepared.<sup>565</sup>

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<sup>562</sup> Mann, *Taking on General Motors* 148-149.

<sup>563</sup> Kevin Boyle, “The Kiss: Racial and Gender Conflict in a 1950s Automobile Factory” *Journal of American History* 84, no. 2 (September 1997).

<sup>564</sup> Mann, *Taking on General Motors*, 147.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

The Van Nuys campaign tapped into the “deep reservoirs of class anger as well as racial and national sentiments” in Los Angeles’ Chicano and black communities, according to Mann. It was a site where individuals like Mann began to grow angry about factories running away to other countries. He shows that it engaged community leaders in a battle that had “tangible objectives” while also serving the “broader goals of political and economic empowerment.”<sup>566</sup> A coalition of church members, student leaders in MEChA, Chicano intellectuals like Rodolfo Acuña, and politicians like Maxine Waters and Jesse Jackson lent their platforms to the UAW workers in attempts to stop the plant from closing. This highlights the plan the League shared in their labor work and how they believed in a united front approach. Mann shows that for many in the black and Latino communities the confrontation with GM took on a “symbolic meaning” as a showdown versus the number one corporation in the Fortune 500 at the time.<sup>567</sup> For Mann, of the many “critical elements” of the overall community strategy, the active and visible role of the Chicano and black community leadership was the “decisive factor in the campaign’s initial success.”<sup>568</sup> The plant ultimately closed in 1992 when it moved to Quebec, Canada but the labor-community coalition initially worked to keep it open.

Internal League memos highlight Mann’s activism in the organization’s labor section during the 1980s before he left the organization. In an evaluation of Mann by the San Jose labor section in 1981 they show that he had been working in the district for three years. “He and his wife moved down here when they got jobs with Ford,” according to the document. They show that Mann had rejoined the organization after a year and a half away after he left on an “antagonistic basis” during a split in the ATM. He spent two years doing auto work after he rejoined in May 1979. His main responsibilities were in helping form a “caucus at Ford and in

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<sup>566</sup> Mann, *Taking on General Motors*, 376.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid, 377.

building the UAW network and the contract struggle” going on in the auto industry.<sup>569</sup> Mann was active in a network tour of the UAW that sent him to the Midwest and East Coast to meet other workers and he was also active in the UAW national convention. During the time of the evaluation he was a member of the labor commission. Like other League evaluations the document includes his strengths and weaknesses as a communist. His strengths included being “dedicated to organization and socialist revolution” and his studying of newspapers and readings was always taken seriously.<sup>570</sup>

An evaluation for Lian Hurst Mann also in 1981 gives insight into her activism in the auto industry. Hurst Mann had been working at an auto plant in San Jose for two years at the time of the document. She helped to organize the production line and made demands for a new contract. Hurst Mann was involved in a struggle over her “overloaded job” and won that struggle versus her union and the company because she was being overloaded for being known as a “communist and agitator.”<sup>571</sup> The evaluation shows that since both Mann and Hurst Mann worked at the same plant they had “made a lot of sacrifices” during the time as they were active in mass work, working overtime, and having their child in childcare for up to 65 hours per week as a result of this. Hurst Mann is shown to have been a key person in setting up the League’s childcare system and working closely on the *Unity* newspapers distribution and book keeping.

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<sup>569</sup> Memo From: SJ Labor Section/SJDO To: LADO; PB – Secretariat Regarding” EM’s Evaluation 12/4/81, 1. Eric Mann and Lian Hurst Mann Papers, 1967-2007. MS 657, Series 3 box , Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA.

<sup>570</sup> Memo From: SJ Labor Section/SJDO To: LADO; PB – Secretariat Regarding” EM’s Evaluation 12/4/81, 2.

<sup>571</sup> Memo From: SJDC To: LADO Regarding: Evaluation of LM 11/22/81, 1. Polemics/Reports: Mann, Lian Hurst Evaluation upon Transfer from San Jose to Los Angeles Eric Mann and Lian Hurst Mann Papers, 1967-2007. MS 657, Series 3 box , Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA.

She not only worked in the auto industry but served as the childcare coordinator of the district and helped to develop and implement its first successful childcare system.<sup>572</sup>

Internal memos regarding the League's work in Van Nuys shows a point of bitter dispute between Mann and those in higher positions in the organization. Mann argued in his written summation for the League of the campaign to keep the plant open that the struggle reflected some of the "richest communist experience in labor work" during the period.<sup>573</sup> The experience raised his and others level of theory but it did bring up issues like what to do when working with a progressive local president such as Pete Beltran who was willing to work with communists and taking on the international union. Mann claims it was possible to work with Beltran for the benefit of the League and that by working with him it did not automatically mean they had to agree with him all of the time. Working with Beltran and the union gave Mann and others an understanding of the customs and traditions of the union. Over time they realized that the key was building a "strong, organized, militant group of workers" who could understand certain basic questions like racial discrimination, women's oppression, and what it meant to take on a major company like GM.<sup>574</sup>

His sum up of the campaign shows how he and other League members were actively thinking about how to integrate the Chicano national question into the struggle. He highlights that BG, or Bill Gallegos, was assigned to set up a section that would serve as a valley unit for this reasoning. They would try to build unity between the auto and Chicano struggle following the united front approach that they had. Their main aspect of their line became to "keep Chicanos

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<sup>572</sup> Memo From: SJDC To: LADO Regarding: Evaluation of LM 11/22/81, 2.

<sup>573</sup> "The Campaign to Keep GM Van Nuys Open: Initial Lessons and the Future Direction," 1. Polemic/Report: Mann, Eric Sum up of the General Motors Van Nuys Campaign with Response Eric Mann and Lian Hurst Mann Papers, 1967-2007. MS 657, Series 3 box , Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid, 4.

in the UAW.”<sup>575</sup> Here the intersection of Gallegos’ article on the Sunbelt Strategy and the work the League took in the southwest becomes clear. Mann, like Gallegos, writes that the valley district argued that because of the heavy concentration in the Southwest of the auto industry and its desire to leave the area, GM’s policies were an attack on a “whole people.” This led the group to grapple with the notion that national movements were not a “lower” or “secondary” form of struggle to the “higher” or “primary” struggles of the workers movement but rather the two were intertwined.<sup>576</sup>

The demand for keeping Chicanos in the UAW needed to be linked to the “demand for self-determination for the Chicano people” and that the League’s goal was to create a “mass understanding” of Chicanos as an oppressed people. The right to self-determination in the “historical homeland” of Chicanos in the southwest was a real question for the League which needed to be at the center of the demand to keep GM Van Nuys open.<sup>577</sup> For these reasons the League sought to build ties with “certain figures” in the Chicano national movement such as Rodolfo Acuña, and to target certain MEChA chapters at places like the California State University Northridge for the purposes of building greater ties between Chicano workers at the plant and other movements.

Struggles did occur such as against chauvinism within the unit working around the GM Van Nuys organizing, according to a League write up. They write that “in any multi-national unit with comrades” who were “White (Jewish), White (Christian), Japanese American, Mexicano, Chicano, and Central American” there would be “significant contradictions.” The writers show that the “white comrades” joined the League precisely because of its “strong commitment to the national question.” Some of the people in the unit felt that Eric Mann was working too closely

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<sup>575</sup> “The Campaign to Keep GM Van Nuys Open: Initial Lessons and the Future Direction,” 10.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>577</sup> *Ibid.*

with Pete Beltran and that this showed his “serious bureaucratic tendencies” by running the campaign as a labor bureaucrat less than as a communist. The critiques were that some of the people in the unit found Mann “very hard to work with.”<sup>578</sup> Mann felt that it was necessary for him to keep close contact with Beltran and other people such as Acuña, Father Olivares, and Maxine Waters in order to build a coalition to Keep GM Van Nuys open. This struggle was eventually what led him to leave the League. The League’s racial make up is briefly mentioned in this piece which deserves being stressed. In one labor unit for example, they had a mixture of different races and religion which could be tough as they indicate.

As a result of their work in GM Van Nuys, however, the League was able to develop a community coalition while making new contacts in the Chicano movement. The future of the League’s work in the Chicano national movement would require making connections to the rest of the Chicano working class, and to the larger working class in general.<sup>579</sup>

### **The Watsonville Canning Strike, 1985-1987**

League activists also concentrated their efforts on the struggles of the Watsonville cannery workers in the mid 1980s. Peter Shapiro, former labor editor of the League’s newspaper *Unity*, published a book on the strike and its significance to what the League sought to do among laborers. *Song of a Stubborn Thousand: The Watsonville Canning Strike, 1985-1987* is a full-length monograph which contributes to the understanding of both what the League did and how a former League member is active in recuperating its history with skills learned during his activism.<sup>580</sup> This section does not seek to replace the work Shapiro does but rather I put it further into context with the Chicano national question and self-determination. The League connected

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<sup>578</sup> “The Campaign to Keep GM Van Nuys Open: Initial Lessons and the Future Direction,” 15.

<sup>579</sup> Memo From: SJ Labor Section/SJDO To: LADO; PB – Secretariat Regarding” EM’s Evaluation 12/4/81, 16A-17A.

<sup>580</sup> Shapiro, *Song of the Stubborn One Thousand*.



various movements during this four-year long struggle. Watsonville represents for the League where they brought politics by bringing Jesse Jackson to the city, student movements when they filled busses of MEChA students, and labor when they brought workers from San Francisco to support the majority Chicana strikers both monetarily and on the picket line.

Two men played central roles in the League's activism in Watsonville. Salvadoran born Oscar Rios, a former member of Los Siete De La Raza and the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement, merged with ATM and IWK to become a League activist. The seasoned activist would eventually go on to take political office in the city including terms as vice-mayor and mayor. Hailing from San Francisco, Rios had been working with Raza Unida, an organization operating within Local 2 of the Hotel and Restaurant Workers union. Local 2 is important to recognize because it was one the most notable and largest unions in San Francisco which would support the Watsonville strikers. The League was able to draw on its network of contacts that they had built up over time such as the Latino caucus Raza Unida within Local 2 along with several chapters of MEChA and community organizations in San Jose. At one point they even filled five busses for a rally held in October.<sup>581</sup>

Rios was on the payroll of the UPS when the Watsonville strike began but had been on disability after suffering an injury. Shapiro indicates that while recovering he was helping his friend Rafael Espinoza, who served as the head of Raza Unida, and had been elected vice president of Local 2. Espinoza had arranged for the cannery strikers to speak at a public meeting at Local 2's union hall which included Reina Diaz. It is after this meeting that Rios was "so impressed with the strikers" that Shapiro shows he volunteered to move to Watsonville to help another League activist Manuel Diaz.<sup>582</sup> The League connected the struggles of cannery workers

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<sup>581</sup> Shapiro, *Song of the Stubborn One Thousand*, 77.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

with those of the big city by having a forum on the two together. Both of these sets of workers were classified by the League as the lower strata laborers they needed to organize.

Espinoza worked as a bellman and shop steward at the Sheraton Palace hotel in San Francisco. During his campaign for vice president of Local 2 he was described as a “strong advocate for the rights of Latino, Chinese, Filipino, Black and other minority workers” Espinoza helped to found and eventually lead Latinos Unidos which League affiliates worked with.<sup>583</sup> Formed as a caucus of Latino Local 2 workers, Latinos Unidos helped them voice their struggles and fight for their rights. He also served as the Spanish spokesperson to the Spanish speaking media for a 1980 hotel strike that was ran. He was also elected as a member of the hotel contract negotiating team after being a union member since 1974 while working in various hotels. Espinoza helped to organize the first meeting ever held in Spanish in the Union so to help inform Latino workers about the 1980 hotel strike and the contract struggle.

Espinoza and the Watsonville workers helped promote the struggles of the other which was facilitated by the League who was involved in both labor circles. For example, Espinoza claims “as a Latino, I know that the struggle for equality and justice for us is a painful experience.” He poses that farmworkers played a role in the late 1960s and early 1970s in regards to labor organizing and connects them to what the cannery workers at Watsonville were doing. He wrote, “The Watsonville strikers are helping to unite our Raza and are helping to form a united front for justice and equality” especially in Northern California. “The fusion of labor and community” could be a powerful force as Espinoza claimed. This was also the line of the

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<sup>583</sup> “Local 2 Elections 1978-1979,” Bill Walker- Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees, Local 2 Collection Box 1 Folder 12. Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA.

League in which both they and Espinoza believed in standing for the “dignity of men and women.”<sup>584</sup>

An October 1985 flyer by *Unity* newspaper highlights that speakers from Watsonville, Local 2, and other workers appeared at a forum together. The forum on the “significance of the Watsonville strike” brought together strike leaders from Watsonville, Latino rank and file members from Local 2, and Mexican and Chicano janitors from a janitor’s movement in San Jose. The League and the forum connected the struggle of the workers to the Chicano national movement. “Lower strata workers” according to the flyers were taking the lead in the movement.<sup>585</sup> Bill Gallegos claims that what was especially significant about the Watsonville and other labor struggles related to Chicana/os and Latina/os were that they were where the League utilized their stuff on the Chicano national question.

When Oscar Rios arrived into Watsonville he was accompanied by Reina Diaz who was a mother of seven and a League member. Reina’s oldest son, Manuel Diaz, was also a League member and would play a key role for the League in the struggle. They show once again that families were participating in the organization together. Reina had worked for years in the Libby’s Cannery in San Jose according to Shapiro and served as the president of Raza Si, a Chicano organization in San Jose focused on immigrant rights.<sup>586</sup> She was a “seasoned organizer” and “something of a legend” in her community. Manuel was hired at the warehouse at the plant where his mother worked after graduating high school and later did “farm labor, tended bar, worked as a teachers assistant, and spent a year at Stanford after graduating from the local community college.” While at Stanford he came across *Seize the Time*, a Marxist-Leninist

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<sup>584</sup> “Local 2 Elections 1978-1979.”

<sup>585</sup> Flyer, “A Unity Newspaper Forum: The Significance of the Watsonville Strike” Box 1 Folder Frank Bardecke/ Watsonville Papers/ Larc. MS. 0093 Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA.

<sup>586</sup> Shapiro, *Song of the Stubborn One Thousand*, 72.

organization, that did work on the Anti-Bakke Decision Coalition with ATM and IWK and eventually merged with the League. Shapiro shows that since 1978 Manuel had been working at the Del Monte plant in San Jose and became an organizer on payroll within the plant.<sup>587</sup>

Diaz and Rios entering Watsonville was not welcomed by some of the left oriented activists but they helped to establish a striker's committee to which Gloria Betancourt was elected to be on. For some people this "conjured up suspicions of a hidden political agenda."<sup>588</sup> People were suspicious of the League but others like labor organizer Frank Bardecke knew of the League's work in the canneries that he did not view them like outsiders like others.

Flyers published by the League reveal their activism around the Watsonville struggle. For example, a flyer advertised by the organization announced a speaker presented by *Unity* Newspaper. The event was to be held at a Methodist Church in San Jose where childcare would be provided. It was to celebrate the "one-year resistance to concessions and union busting" and to teach people about the "upsurge" in the cannery workers movements. The flyer indicates that the League wanted to connect how significant the struggle was for both the Chicano and labor movements.<sup>589</sup>

Another workshop on the "Lessons from the Watsonville" promoted a speaker serving as a representative from the League in April, 1987. The representative of the League spoke on the significance of the Watsonville strike for building the workers movements in the United States. A video titled "*Si Se Puede*" was showed and conveyed the conclusion of the 18-month long strike. The event held at Hunter College showed the videos that covered the workers' hunger

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<sup>587</sup> Shapiro, *Song of the Stubborn One Thousand*,

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

<sup>589</sup> Flyer, "Unity Newspaper Presents: One Year on Strike in Watsonville" Box 1 Folder Frank Bardecke/ Watsonville Papers/ Larc. MS. 0093 Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA.

strike, meetings, marches, and the ratification vote and victory celebrations. The win resulted in a “historic contract” for 1,000 Mexicana and cannery workers.<sup>590</sup>

The League did its best to promote both the Watsonville strike as well as another one by Hormel workers by publishing roundtables with the striking workers in an edition of *Forward* in January 1987. The document notes the similarities between the two struggles but the League did feel that Hormel was getting more media attention perhaps because Watsonville was predominantly a Chicana and Mexicana struggle of 1100 cannery workers. The two strikes had workers of very different backgrounds but both were confronting the basic issues facing labor.<sup>591</sup>

In the roundtable dealing with Watsonville, Oscar Rios, a lead organizer for the struggle, asks different workers for their own experiences in the labor strike. Rios is described as a “strike supporter and long time activist in the Chicano/Latino movement.” The roundtable was conducted in mid-October 1986 in Spanish and was translated for *Forward*.<sup>592</sup> Watsonville Canning Company, according to the League, was the nation’s largest frozen food processor at the time when they slashed the wages of their workers in the summer of 1985 by up to 40%. The company also demanded “drastic reductions” in the health benefits and stopped the deduction of union dues from the paychecks of workers.<sup>593</sup> According to the League, the workers union, Teamsters Local 912, was not prepared for a strike. They did, however, elect a rank and file strikers’ committee to handle the day to day actions of the strike including picket lines despite court ordered injunctions. A key to the movement, and one of the major roles the League played, was that the strikers received growing support from the Chicana/o movement.

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<sup>590</sup> Flyer, “Lessons from the Watsonville Strike Victory, Thursday April 16, 1987” Box 1 Folder Frank Bardecke/ Watsonville Papers/ Larc. MS. 0093 Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA.

<sup>591</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, *Forward: Journal of Socialist Thought* 7, no. 1 (January 1987), 2. <https://unityarchiveproject.org/issue/forward-volume-7-number-1-january-1987/>

<sup>592</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, “Round-table discussion with the Watsonville Workers” in *Forward: Journal of Socialist Thought* 7, no. 1 (January 1987), 5.

<sup>593</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, “Round-table discussion with the Watsonville Workers,” 3.

Gloria Betancourt became one of the key leaders in the Watsonville strike and would also be one of the figures the League helped to get on conferences including those with MEChA to build support for the struggle. She worked at the company for 23 years prior to the strike after arriving to the United States in 1962. Betancourt in one of the initial questions asked by Rios regarding the impact of the strike on strikers, families, and the town of Watsonville, alludes to the hard impact caused by strikers not having wages to help their families. She states, “we cannot buy them [family] clothes when they need it or books for certain classes.”<sup>594</sup> Betancourt argues the workers at the company had worked as if they were a single family, united, and trying to defend themselves from the bosses and supervisors. Despite these things, she states that the strikers preferred to stay out of work instead of preferring to go back to the “*desgraciado*” that was the owner.<sup>595</sup>

The strike taught the workers about brotherhood and sisterhood according to Betancourt as it taught them how to struggle together and what it meant to unite in a labor strike. At many times this meant being in opposition to the international union. Betancourt alludes to the difficulty in the strike at first when working with the union especially with representatives that spent their time drinking at the bar. For reasons like this is why they did not have any faith in the union but she believes that they did become stronger after the strikers committee was created. By stronger, she meant that they were able to get the international to be interested in the strike and at the same time to “recognize the value” of strike committee officials which she was a part of.<sup>596</sup>

The strikers received outside support from community groups and Chicano groups including MEChA. In the roundtable they show that support like money, food, and publicity came from students and community organizations like the Mexican American Political

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<sup>594</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, “Round-table discussion with the Watsonville Workers,” 8.

<sup>595</sup> *Desgraciado* translates to calling someone disgraceful. Ibid, 9.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid, 14.

Association and the League of United Latin American Citizens. Political support was also extended from people like Jesse Jackson. Enough support was created for things like the workers to have turkeys on Thanksgiving. Donations came in from across the country including as far as Texas, New Jersey, and New York.

The majority of the strikers and many of the leaders were women according to the round table. Some of the gender dynamics surrounding the strike are shown by Betancourt when she responds that some of the men were not understanding to the women strikers. She states that for some the “woman belongs in the home and some of the husbands did not see women being involved in politics.”<sup>597</sup> According to Betancourt some of the men that were living in Watsonville did not agree with their wives participating in the struggle. Since there was more women than men in the company this is why Betancourt believes they had more participation. Scholars such as Vicki Ruiz and Lori Flores have explored the gender dynamics founding in farming and packing houses as they related to labor movement building.<sup>598</sup> Women such as Betancourt faced responses from their husbands towards their activism in a negative way but despite this she and others continued to build and lead the struggle at Watsonville.

One of the final questions asked by Rios to the roundtable participants surrounds how left groups influenced the strikers. He asked, “You have come into contact with a number of left groups during the strike. After this much time on strike, what do you think of socialist ideas?”<sup>599</sup> To which Betancourt responded, “I like Socialism. It has ideals that are real.”<sup>600</sup> She goes on to

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<sup>597</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, “Round-table discussion with the Watsonville Workers,” 21.

<sup>598</sup> For more on the role of women in the rural labor movement see: Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Lori Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the California Farmworker Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

<sup>599</sup> League of Revolutionary Struggle, “Round-table discussion with the Watsonville Workers,” 22.

<sup>600</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

state that she understood the ideals of socialism more during the strike than she had before. She explains that she read different papers from different groups while getting to meet activists from different organizations.

Gloria Betancourt acknowledges that the arrival of Oscar Rios in Watsonville helped her own political development. She acknowledged that Manuel Diaz and Rios made the strikers feel like what they did had “consequences far beyond Watsonville” which the League also replicated in their ephemera as has been shown. Rios taught Betancourt how to organize and helped the strikers relate themselves to other groups including political organizations and students as told to Shapiro.<sup>601</sup> As mentioned, Rios ended up staying on as a political figure within Watsonville until he decided to step down from city council and “devoted himself full-time” to his job as an organizer for Local 890 in Salinas. Betancourt would go on to serve as a delegate for Jesse Jackson to the 1988 democratic election once again showing the intersection of labor and politics the League advocated. She remained close to Rios according to Shapiro and helped with several of the campaigns by Local 890. She clerked at a local chain drugstore until she retired.<sup>602</sup>

The stories of Oscar Rios and Gloria Betancourt plus those of Reina Diaz and her son Manuel stress how one struggle like Watsonville created opportunities for activists of different stripes to come together with the help of the League. Had the League, and the ATM for that matter, not made lower-stratum work like the canneries a central component of their political line they would not have brought together Jesse Jackson, MEChA university students, and the female cannery workers together. The united front approach informed by the national question and party building motivated the League to bring these different realms of activism together.

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<sup>601</sup> Shapiro, *Song of the Stubborn One Thousand*, 87.

<sup>602</sup> *Ibid*, 199.



## **The League and Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, 1984-1988**

The Jesse Jackson Presidential campaign was a new realm of activism for the League in 1983 and 1984. In an internal memo sent from the Secretariat to the entire organization in August 1984 a summary of their work in the campaign and what it meant for their electoral work in the future was outlined. As early as October, 1983 the League began having discussions around the possibility of entering electoral work and the possibility of a Jackson candidacy. When Jackson announced he was running for the democratic nomination for president on November 3, 1983, the secretariat of the League met immediately and called for the organization to take up the campaign.<sup>603</sup> Their first goals were simple since they had not taken up much electoral work before. They sought to contribute to his campaign while also contributing to party building. A tertiary goal included “making contacts in electoral circles” and putting themselves in “good positions” to run for elective offices. Activists in the League and the organization succeeded in this. They were hired as staff on the state level, as well as volunteers that assumed positions of responsibilities.

The League claimed they were “instrumental in building support for Jackson” in Latino communities across the country including the Bronx in New York and throughout California. Particularly in California the Secretariat claims they were able to influence Jackson's positions on “imports, labor, Latino and Asian issues, and on China” by participating in the drafting of his speeches and briefing him before key appearances. Through this work they had “considerable input” into Jackson's speeches and his campaign schedule since the League represented an

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<sup>603</sup> Memo From: Secretariat (of LRS) To: Entire organization, “Summary of Work in the Jesse Jackson Campaign Some Guidelines for Our Electoral Work in this Next Period,” A1. Political Statements: Jesse Jackson/Electoral Campaign August 14, 1984. Eric Mann and Lian Hurst Mann Papers, 1967-2007. MS 657, Series 3 box , Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA.

important constituency of people and held staff positions.<sup>604</sup> This would also prove itself clear when Jackson gave speeches during the labor struggles in places like Watsonville and Van Nuys.

The organization recruited through the campaign and moved a “fairly larger circle of contacts closer” to the League because of their work. The League had to grapple with building a communist party and working on an electoral campaign. This signifies a shift in the group’s thinking. They learned that they could not forget that they were Marxist-Leninists and could not just be campaign workers. Originally the League hesitated to get involved in electoral politics because they felt it would pit their time between their ongoing struggles and the Jackson campaign. They claimed this was “erroneous reasoning” since the Jackson campaign in the League’s opinion represented the “most revolutionary cutting edge of a people’s challenge to monopoly capitalism.”<sup>605</sup> The Rainbow Coalition in 1984 and Jackson’s campaign as the League shows was predominantly run by its strongest base, the African American community. However, Jackson branched out the coalition and it would actually influence his attempts at becoming a candidate on a labor-liberal coalition. The League recognized his critiques of capitalism and the need to work in this realm of activism.

The multinational setting became “one of the most rewarding aspects” that the League had working with the Rainbow Coalition. They “genuinely” felt that the African American masses that made up the backbone of the Jackson campaign were attempting to achieve multinational unity. “Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans felt that the Rainbow Coalition, in effect, with the Black Liberation movement,” would give each of their national movements

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<sup>604</sup> “Summary of Work in the Jesse Jackson Campaign Some Guidelines for Our Electoral Work in this Next Period,” A2.

<sup>605</sup> “Summary of Work in the Jesse Jackson Campaign Some Guidelines for Our Electoral Work in this Next Period,” A11.

“additional clout,” according to the League.<sup>606</sup> Members of the League worked to recruit individuals from their electoral work similar to how they did with other sectors of their mass work. Non-Jackson campaign cadres sold *Unity* at mass Jackson events while also handing out leaflets. They sold the newspaper and spoke to folks at Jackson rallies, marches, programs, and after individual meetings. Their general policy was to sell one-to-one- after meetings and outside of the meeting hall. They wanted a “little separation between our role as participants in the coalition” and as supporters of *Unity*.<sup>607</sup> This was to try and avoid being red baited or attacked by the right wing about League cadres operating in the Rainbow.

The Jackson campaign taught the League that electoral work should not be “regarded solely as united front work” but rather should be viewed as a “key front in the revolutionary struggle for the full extension of democracy to oppressed nationalities and the working class.” They decided that they should organize electoral campaigns in such as way that “workers and other mass elements can fully participate, and be educated in the process.”<sup>608</sup> Thus, the League held strong views on the 1984 Jackson campaign that they continued the work through his 1988 presidential run and used the contacts they made in 1984 to bring him to Watsonville, Van Nuys, and Sacramento in the struggles related to Chicana/os to have him speak while garnering media attention for their struggles.

By 1988, Jackson was running for the second time on the democratic nomination. People such as Theresa Montañó, Eric Mann, Bill Gallegos, and other key League activists had networks within the coalition and connected Jackson not only to Watsonville but they also had him speak at events for the United Automobile Workers where Eric Mann was organizing.

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<sup>606</sup> “Summary of Work in the Jesse Jackson Campaign Some Guidelines for Our Electoral Work in this Next Period,” A13.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid, A16.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid, A20.

The League also helped to bring Reverend Jesse Jackson to Watsonville for a speech on a Sunday on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1986. Jackson had run for president in 1984, for which the League organized around, and remained attuned to the struggles of people of colors through his organization the Rainbow Coalition. League activists held positions within the Jackson campaign and were able to utilize his political influence at struggles including that of the Watsonville workers. He appeared as the keynote speaker at a benefit breakfast at Watsonville High School joined by members of the Rainbow Coalition and “Chicano community leaders, Teamster and AFL-CIO officials, elected officials from Santa Cruz and students.” The event according to the Northern California Watsonville Strike Support Committee raised funds and drew media attention to the striking workers and their demands. The breakfast was sponsored by local 912 and had about 1,000 attendees. After his keynote message, Jackson led a walk from the high school to a local park for a solidarity rally attended by over 3,500 supporters. At the rally he exclaimed that Watsonville was the “struggle today what Selma was to the Civil Rights Movement twenty years ago.” He also connected labor to politics by stating “hands that pick broccoli, Brussel spouts should be hands that pick the city council and other politicians.”<sup>609</sup>

Jesse Jackson’s speech in Watsonville reflected that he believed a liberal-labor coalition would be a major force in the political realignment of the nation.<sup>610</sup> Shapiro poses that his speech in Watsonville reflected that he sought to establish his credentials as a labor candidate. In his speech he claimed that Watsonville was to economic justice what Selma, Alabama represented to political justice 20 years earlier. The heart of his speech was a “call for Latino political power” by eluding to a city system that left Latino voters voiceless in the Watsonville city government.

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<sup>609</sup> Northern California Watsonville Strike Support Committee Packet August 1986, 1. Box 1 Folder Frank Bardecke/ Watsonville Papers/ Larc. MS. 0093 Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA.

<sup>610</sup> Shapiro, *Song of the Stubborn One Thousand*, 146.

He appealed that the “Hands that once picked cucumbers and broccoli” should be able to pick their governors and presidents. Within the speech he eluded to something the League and Jackson’s Rainbow Coalition fought for, new coalitions bringing people together to “redirect the course” of the nation.<sup>611</sup>

Eric Mann and the League also brought Jesse Jackson to speak at a rally for UAW workers at GM Van Nuys in 1986. Jackson at this rally told the workers, “You are the freedom fighters, battling for economic and social justice against Reagan radicalism and corporate fascism. You are the real freedom fighters, not the contras. They are trying to destroy factories in Nicaragua; you are trying to keep factories open in America. Stand tall, stand proud, keep fighting and you will save your plant.” Mann, like Shapiro, shows that Jackson after his failed 1984 presidential campaign began to utilize his public visibility in “support of labor causes” throughout the country including Watsonville and Van Nuys. It is no coincidence that this is where the League was being most active during the time since they had worked in his campaign their close contacts proved crucial for helping link Jackson to the struggles. Jackson at his Van Nuys speech also indicated that if GM decided to close the plant, he pledged himself and the resources from the Rainbow Coalition to boycott GM products if necessary.<sup>612</sup>

The Jackson presidential campaigns represented some of the League’s most important activism during the 1980s. The shift to electoral politics also signified a shift in the 1980s away from rigid studying of the Marxist canon. Over the years the organization began accepting more members that did not have the probationary periods as lengthy as those of people like Eva Martinez and Theresa Montaña who were in ATM study groups for years. Bill Gallegos and Eva Martinez in separate oral histories each believed this became a major flaw of the organization.

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<sup>611</sup> Shapiro, *Song of the Stubborn One Thousand*, 147.

<sup>612</sup> Mann, *Taking on General Motors*, 236.

The 1980s represented an interesting moment when some people who entered the universities in the 1960s and became radicalized had moved on to professions like becoming professors or lawyers. This became a double edged sword as the organization had more money based on the dues paid by activists and families.

Despite these changes in the make-up of the organization, people were still organizing at the point of production as shown in this chapter. League members participated in student movements as well and attempted to connect the students with those in the canneries and the factories. These two distinct realms of activism were also used to bring attention to Jesse Jackson's attempts at winning the democratic presidential nomination in both 1984 and 1988. Although he did not win either of the nominations it did signify for the League a turn to electoral politics while also somewhat denoting a shift away from party building. The activism the League had stretched from California to across the nation while also publishing ephemera weekly, biweekly, and monthly. The organization became a "well-oiled machine" as referred to by Beto Flores but this did not mean they were not subject to criticisms and attacks. Global, domestic, and local situations created a political atmosphere in which the League would cease to exist after 1990. For many members of the League this would shake their political and personal lives.

## CONCLUSION: Dissolution of the League of Revolutionary Struggle and Political Afterlives

The League of Revolutionary Struggle formally dissolved on September 8, 1990 with the release of their statement on dissolution. 28 of the 33 members of the Central Committee voted to disband the organization.<sup>613</sup> International, domestic, and personal issues among League activists created a political climate that made the organization debate the viability of being a Marxist-Leninist and communist oriented organization in the late 1980s. Interviews with former members and internal documents show that events such as Tiananmen square and in the perspective of some members the “cultish,” and a “cult-like” atmosphere around the chairwoman of the organization, created the context for which the group began to stop functioning. The decline of the Soviet Union was also occurring during this time but interviews with former League members as well as documents related to the matter focus more on China considering this is who the League aligned itself with. What resulted during the months leading up to September were debates around the viability of being a Marxist-Leninist named group and how Vladimir Lenin’s ideology of vanguardism was not what the group had thought for the previous 12 years. The argument that was so central to the New Communist movement based on the writings of Lenin on party building as the most central tasks for communists was no longer applicable according to the League.

Dissolution of the League impacted personal friendships that had existed since the days of the August 29<sup>th</sup> Movement (ATM) for over 16 years. I seek to show in this conclusion what

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<sup>613</sup> It is unclear who exactly were the authors of the dissolution statement as well as who were the 28 signers of the document. Eva Martinez in her oral history claims that some of the names used in the various documents related to the dissolution of the League are fake. This makes it a bit difficult to understand who said what and who wrote or signed what. “Statement on the Dissolution of the League of Revolutionary Struggle.” <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-7/lrs-dissolve.pdf>

dissolution of the League meant for some of its Chicana/o members and the ramifications for their activist life trajectories. Scholarship on what it meant for African Americans and Asian Americans still needs to be done. The downfall of the League according to some former members came at its peak, while having no gradual decline. It is important to understand why this happened suddenly, and how it influenced the political after-lives of the members of the League of Revolutionary Struggle. These activists as this dissertation has shown sought institutional power during the 1970s and 1980s to create structural change. The larger narrative arc and life trajectory of these activists indicates that many were finally able to successfully claim positions of power within labor unions and universities, something they attempted to do as members of the ATM and the League. For many, their radical imagination, dreaming, and organizing did not go away. Thus, they continue to push historians and scholars to consider how they are a legacy and a part of a Latina/o radical tradition.

Two camps existed when dissolution arguments occurred in late 1989 and 1990 and Chicana/os fell into both of them. Bill Gallegos and Theresa Montaña would go on to write what would be the dissenting opinion signed by 5 Central Committee members to keep the organization going in opposition to the 28 that signed the statement of dissolution.<sup>614</sup> First I will explore what dissolution signified for the organization and then how people like Gallegos and Montaña approached the situation. Roberto “Beto” Flores was with the group of 28 that called for the end of the organization and I also situate his position. Lastly, this conclusion looks at what happened to activists such as these three and others that were discussed throughout this dissertation. This is an attempt to stress what the League and the ATM meant for each of them and how they utilized what they learned in the organizations to their next stages of activism. Not

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<sup>614</sup> “Congress Papers #2 Moving Forward Our Tradition by 5 Central Committee Members.” <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-7/lrs-last-congress-2/moving.htm>



everyone continued their activism but many did. For example, some continued their labor work with unions while others established community-based institutional organizations or worked in the environmental justice movement that they all continuing impacting the political trajectory of those components of activism. Some of the former members also went on to become university professors or serve as other professionals.

It is clear that the events of Tiananmen Square during 1989 influenced League activists in regards to dissolving the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist organization. Personal family matters like marriages also were significant according to oral histories. Ultimately, two camps formed around the dissolution of the organization. The minority of the Central Committee requested the opportunity to equally participate at major student cadre meetings and at district-wide discussions across the country in order to present their position on why the organization should stay alive. They alleged they were being denied this opportunity which made the process undemocratic.

The events at Tiananmen Square raised for some members of the League the question of what a communist state would actually look like. It also made them reflect on the role of the need for armed struggle in the overthrow of a democratic state. For Beto Flores it also meant something more. When the person stepped in front of the tanks while carrying his grocery bags and he stopped the encroachment of the tanks, Flores believed that showed that peaceful struggle could be possible. Armed-struggle was something the League had to decide if they wanted to participate in which was stressed by the events in the Communist Republic of China. The event revealed to Flores the type of relationship a top-down power structure could play in maintaining a socialist or communist state. He recalls driving to Oakland from Los Angeles for a Central Committee meeting when hearing on the radio the events and saying, “oh fuck! This means

something for us. We aren't going to replicate that shit.”<sup>615</sup> The events at Tiananmen Square taught the activists in the organization that they had to participate in the armed overthrow of the state in order to overthrow capitalism and establish a socialist society which was “impractical” according to Flores.

The formal dissolution statement written by the majority of the Central Committee of the League became a point of contestation. They mention that at a national conference of the League the formal dissolution vote was taken. As former members of the League they wrote they were “proud to have contributed” over the past 12 years to the “people’s struggle for peace, justice, and equality” and that they would remain committed to that struggle. They felt that they reached a point shaped by their “own experience and by world events” where the “large majority” wished to move beyond the Marxist-Leninist framework, and did not feel that “today’s movement is best served by a Marxist-Leninist form.”<sup>616</sup> The premise of the document is to stress what the League did for 12 years and how they believed that the ideologies they followed for that period were no longer applicable to creating a successful revolution in the United States based on the ideals of socialism and communism.

Marxism-Leninism was adopted by the organization as a theoretical framework as the dissolution and this dissertation show. This helped the members of the League to understand the “nature of capitalism and imperialism,” which presented them with a “revolutionary vision: of what a socialist society would ideally be free from oppression and exploitation.” The organization adopted their theoretical views in their opinion out of “actual work” and not in their books. The books, as this dissertation has shown, were a vital element of the organization for creating a political line in order to organize. The members felt, and I agree, that they played an

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<sup>615</sup> Beto Flores interview by Eddie Bonilla, August 14, 2017.

<sup>616</sup> “Statement on the Dissolution of the League of Revolutionary Struggle.”

important role in leading many critical struggles over their 12-year period and that they made a “real difference in people’s lives” and in strengthening grassroots movements. In particular, they highlight how they worked in the Watsonville cannery strike, Jesse Jackson’s “historic” 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns, the student movements of the 1980s including the fight for educational rights, along with work for reparations for Japanese Americans, workers struggles, immigrant rights, for women’s rights and equality, and for the political empowerment of people of color. The majority of the Central Committee felt that they helped to build “strong multi-racial coalitions at times when racism polarized ethnic groups” to recognize the common interests among racial groups while promoting respect for the “autonomy and independence of various nationality groupings.”<sup>617</sup>

Despite the 12 years of history and the important work the organization did the majority felt that the group needed to go through a dissolution. In their review of world of events they felt that there were “aspects of Marxism-Leninism” and its practices carried out in its name that was “inappropriate, unsuitable, antithetical” to the existence of a democratic and just society. The majority, according to the dissolution statement, did not agree with the following principles of Marxism-Leninism. First, that it was not the “sole ideology for fundamental social change.” They did not feel that it, or any other ideology should have “hegemony” or that it should have a “special leading role” in the mass movements going on of the time.

They did not feel that Marxism-Leninism was “intrinsically superior” to any other progression theory or ideology—something different than what the group advocated for 12 years. They also disagreed with the “Leninist view” of the “vanguard communist party,” and instead the majority believed in a “multi-party democracy” and free elections. They wrote they opposed a “dictatorship of any kind.” The difficulty of maintaining a Leninist vanguard party is that there

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<sup>617</sup> “Statement on the Dissolution of the League of Revolutionary Struggle.”

is the inherent assumption that one group of leaders, sometimes the more intellectual, would lead the others through and after the revolution.

The organization despite dissolution still felt that they could continue to share a vision for a “better society” and believed that a successful American strategy could create fundamental change. They wrote, “We believe in building a united front of people from all classes and walks of life in common struggles for economic justice.” The belief in building a multi-national unity based on the “full equality and self-determination for peoples of color” was still possible. “Jobs, education, health care, and housing” were rights that needed to be continued to be fought for and not treated as privileges. They posed that society needed to be “reorganized” in order to put “human needs before profit.” Those who comprised the League according to the document were “proud to have participated” in the movements and claim they would continue to be active. They asserted that they wanted to “keep working together on common issues” while others would maybe choose to do other things. Despite perhaps having differing views regarding how to “achieve fundamental social change” they asserted that they all agreed to “adopt the attitude that time and practice” would “ultimately show us which path” would be best in achieving their goals. The writers, and signers of the document, close it by stating, “Rest assured, whatever new vehicles of change emerging in the ‘90s, the struggle will continue.”<sup>618</sup>

Bill Gallegos was considered one of the leaders of the minority camp fighting to keep the organization together. He wrote along with others including Theresa Montaña a lengthy response to the Central Committee majority titled, “Moving Forward Our Tradition.” The document is full of charges against the Central Committee for not allowing enough time to debate among the rank and file if dissolution should be the route taken for the organization. They wrote that the debate should take place because it would influence the “development of socialism as a viable force in

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<sup>618</sup> “Statement on the Dissolution of the League of Revolutionary Struggle.”

the American progressive movement.” For some in the organization they felt that they were being asked to “abandon the fundamental beliefs” upon which they had committed their political lives.<sup>619</sup>

The dissenting five Central Committee members believed that a month’s time was too short in order to speak to all rank and file members. They believed the decision of whether or not to reject their ideological and political framework along with dissolving the organization needed more time. The decision, they argued, involved the discussion of the “national question and strategic alliance, our critique of capitalism, the role of classes and especially the working class, the role (if any) of a working class party, and whether or not our objective is socialism” could not be undertaken and completed in four weeks. They claimed that these questions warranted a thorough debate and required speaking with those that English was not their first language and those new members that perhaps were not familiar with Marxism-Leninism. Thus, the group proposed a 3-month period of debate to allow the minority leadership an “equal opportunity” to participate in the debates. They also called for a “comradely spirit” so that the debates could focus on politics and to avoid the prices of questioning “personal motivation, individual character” or the particular situations of any cadre.<sup>620</sup> Although the documents advocated for cordial debate it ended up being that things did get personal as revealed in interviews with people from both camps.

The statement written by Gallegos and helped by others took the time to explain the importance of Marxism and Leninism to their political developments. They write that they did not become Marxists because of “sitting down one day and reading some books,” but instead they became Marxists early into their history because they were “involved in the struggles of the

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<sup>619</sup> “Statement on the Dissolution of the League of Revolutionary Struggle.”

<sup>620</sup> “Congress Papers #2 Moving Forward Our Tradition by 5 Central Committee Members.”

people.” They turned to Marxism-Leninism because they saw that many of the liberation struggles in what was then called the Third World were led by Marxist-Leninists. They turned to the ideology because it helped them answer the questions to which they claim their practice alone could not answer such as “what was the reason for the suffering and exploitation” they saw, and what were the root causes of “national oppression, racism, sexism, and the exploitation of people.” Marxism-Leninism helped them examine what kind of system could possibly replace the one they had and how a revolution could happen in the United States. Marxism provided them with a “methodology and an experience” which they could apply to understand their situation in the U.S. in a “much deeper and clear way” not just that capitalism was the problem but also “how and why” capitalism functions the way that it does. It was their experience that drew them to embrace Marxism-Leninism and they did it “so consciously and with enthusiasm.”<sup>621</sup>

Marxism helped them to “analyze and understand” the Chicana/o and African American struggles as well as the struggles of oppressed nations. The group wrote that they believed “now more than ever” that they needed to uphold the “right of self-determination for the oppressed Black, Chicano and Hawaiian nations.” Notably missing in this list was Asian Americans but they did write, “We uphold the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination,” not just as formulations, but as “reflective of a living social reality” in the United States that needed to be dealt with. The League was born out of the national movements including the Chicana/o, Black liberation, and Asian American movements. This is what made them “unique among the left” in the opinion of both camps as well as scholars such as Max Elbaum. They argued that the League made the “most complete and accurate” perspective of the U.S. national question.<sup>622</sup> The national

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<sup>621</sup> “Congress Papers #2 Moving Forward Our Tradition by 5 Central Committee members.”

<sup>622</sup> Ibid.

question would continue being critical for the revolution as long as U.S. imperialism and monopoly capitalism existed as posed by the 5 minority central committee members.

Nomenclature and the question of clandestinity also laid at the heart of the debate of dissolution and whether the League should become an open organization with open members, continue being part-secret and part-open, or ultimately just to disband. The dissenting minority wrote that the League should continue but did not feel that they needed to call themselves Marxist-Leninists but did need to state “forthrightly” that they were fighting for socialism.<sup>623</sup> The Central Committee disagreed with this point in a short response to the piece written by the group because they did not believe that was a feasible strategy.<sup>624</sup> Being an open socialist organization according to the five would allow them to make more “rapid strides” in mass work.<sup>625</sup> They wrote that they felt there was no longer a need to be clandestine because it prevented them from “broadly propagating” their politics. Under fascism, or a more oppressive state, they argue they would have to resort to secrecy. The overall position of the five individuals is that the League was always a Marxist-Leninist organization that creatively applied Marxism-Leninism to their lived reality in the United States. Important changes to the political line did need to occur if the group continued as claimed by the five individuals but they felt that an open socialist organization was still needed.

In a collection of documents under the name of “Congress Papers 2,” the Central Committee majority, 28 people, wrote a “Brief Response” to the paper written by the five central committee members. They claim that the minority group was awarded time and that they did visit and speak to the members of the League that were primarily Chinese or Spanish speaking

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<sup>623</sup> “Congress Papers #2 Moving Forward Our Tradition by 5 Central Committee members.”

<sup>624</sup> Central Committee Majority (Signed by 28 people), “Congress Papers #2, A Brief Response to the Paper by Five Central Committee Members, Called “Moving Our Traditions Forward,” August 1, 1990.”  
<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-7/lrs-last-congress-2/brief-response.htm>

<sup>625</sup> “Congress Papers #2 Moving Forward Our Tradition by 5 Central Committee Members.”

members. The Central Committee makes two points in the document. One is in regards to the question of judging their activism by their practice and history. They write, “we are the ones who moved to Watsonville to participate in that struggle. We went to work in working class jobs in factories, hotels and department stores. The overwhelming majority of the lower strata workers in this organization agree with the majority positions.” Charges by the dissenting minority were made that questioned the commitment of the majority Central Committee members that were from the “petty bourgeoisie” with “options” yet they state that they were the ones who “quite our jobs, risked our futures, and made many personal sacrifices” to aid in MEChA and other situations throughout the years. They argue that it was outrageous for their commitment to be criticized because they chose to disband the organization.<sup>626</sup>

Oral histories with select Chicana/o members of the League from both sides of the dissolution camp match the written documents from the dissolution debate period. For example, Bill Gallegos recalls the split in the League appealing to the more “negative things” about people’s careers. In regards to dissolution he felt that former members of I Wor Kuen (IWK) were able to reconnect with a certain privilege the League had actually benefitted from. IWK before the merger had a more developed infrastructure in regards to printing their newspaper whereas ATM was printing out of their houses. A “class thing” in the words of Gallegos, came out in the dissolution where a lot of the IWK leadership came from the “upper middle or bourgeois class.” During the split he felt they “forgot Marxism” and that the organization had become “too cultish” around the chair of the group.<sup>627</sup>

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<sup>626</sup> “A Brief Response to the Paper by Five Central Committee Members, called “Moving Our Traditions Forward” By the Central Committee Majority.”

<sup>627</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.



Eric Mann who left the organization in 1984 felt that this was true six years prior to the organization dissolving.<sup>628</sup> Gallegos stressed that the chairwoman was “brilliant and driven” and did 80 hour weeks for the organization. Events around the chair in regards to a personal crisis in the opinion of Gallegos did not help when the dissolving the organization became an idea. “Since we focused so much around her, it put the organization in crisis,” Gallegos recollected. Others, he claimed, also indicated that a personal crisis he was going through at the time, was a reason to why he was partially in the minority position.<sup>629</sup> It seems it was a common occurrence that people were attacking personal situations in people’s lives as the two groups were disagreeing on what to do with the larger national organization.

Gallegos recalls that when the split went down and the League “dissolved away from Marx,” the individuals that controlled the “infrastructure, the budget, the press” and other components of the group were promoting dissolution. He admits that he represented the leader of the minority position and that the statement was his own perspective. The document matches his feelings years later from an oral history conducted with him in his home in 2018. The documents around dissolution, he felt, were “not meaningful. Instead, the struggle got really nasty” and was a “tough time” personally for Gallegos.

He remembers phone calls being exchanged between the camps threatening the opposition. One example, was a person affiliated with the minority camp received a phone call bribing them with a scholarship for law school at a prestigious private California university if the person sided with them. Gallegos remembers Theresa Montaña also received a call in regards to her involvement with a union for which she would “never get elected” to positions of leadership. To which Gallegos remembers Montaña telling them “You think that’s why I became a

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<sup>628</sup> Eric Mann interview by Eddie Bonilla, May 2, 2018.

<sup>629</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

revolutionary. Go fuck yourself.” The culture around dissolution was “very unhealthy.” For Gallegos he recalls two key leaders in the League that had been active with him in the movement since the start of ATM in 1974 isolating him. They would avoid sitting next to him after Central Committee functions such as at dinners. He recalls being “pissed for a very long time” because they had shared an ideology, politics, and a friendship” and they had been through “a lot of shit together” that he felt he was betrayed. His sons told him to let it go to which Gallegos claims he has.<sup>630</sup>

Beto Flores was one of the Chicana/o members of the League that had also been active in the ATM with Gallegos that agreed to dissolve the League and also remembers “a lot of pain” and sentiment going into the process. What the organization dissolved was a “well-oiled machine” that was churning out newspapers bi-weekly, theoretical journals almost monthly, and a group that was active in different sectors of society. Flores by 1989 and 1990 felt that he was becoming against “top-down communism,” and the vanguard ideology became an issue for him. He remembers bumping heads with Gallegos around this issue over the years. Flores felt that a “pedestal and pyramid” of leadership had been built and the League was a top-down organization. In Flores’ opinion, a lot of the relationships that came from the “grassroots” caused the ill feeling over dissolution. Flores acknowledges that he was “very much in the dissolution camp” which he claims he is known for and “hated” for. “I understand their pain,” Flores felt in regards to the working class Chicana/o activists that were members in the ATM and the League that wanted to keep the organization running. Yet he also remembers the phone calls and threats he received. His family overheard him over the phone yelling with individuals he claims were sent by Gallegos to harass him.<sup>631</sup> The two activists reflect two different sides of the dissolution

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<sup>630</sup> Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

<sup>631</sup> Beto Flores interview by Eddie Bonilla, August 14, 2017.

camp but both stress the pain and sentiment that went into the process due to the friendships and kin ties over the years.

Theresa Montaño, who was Gallegos' sister-in-law at the time of dissolution, recalls asking who was trying to keep the organization and who was not during the dissolution process. She felt some of the pro-dissolution individuals had "more comfortable lifestyles and something to fall back on" while individuals like Gallegos didn't have anything to "fall back on." She felt those in the minority to keep the organization were "much more committed to socialism and the rights of working people" than some of the others. Gallegos, for Montaño, "gave up everything" for the League and that those who were Chicana/o had "nothing" when dissolution went down. "I still hold that resentment in some ways," Montaño exclaimed during an interview at a local Los Angeles coffee shop. She feels that individuals from the organization were able to establish professional careers in ways that some of the Chicana/o members were unable to. The Chicana/os in Montaño's opinion received a "thanks for everything, see you later" from the Central Committee.<sup>632</sup>

Eva Martinez recalls there actually being three camps when dissolution occurred. One camp from leadership that declared dissolution was happening, the other in leadership that didn't want to see the organization dissolve, and then a larger camp that was asking "what is going on," which she was a part of. When dissolution happened she was going through personal events as well and remembers being "devastated" by it all since it "came out of nowhere." She voiced her opinion at a forum on dissolution by saying that she felt the group needed to become open socialists. She recalls that the process was supposed to go on longer than it did but that leadership "cut it short." Martinez felt that the organization going away from their studying

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<sup>632</sup> Theresa Montaño interview by Eddie Bonilla, August 22, 2018.

tradition to instead being involved at elite institutions like Stanford University and Ivy League schools or Jesse Jackson's campaign played a role in the organization falling apart.<sup>633</sup>

Responsibility is something the majority Central Committee members wrote in their response to the dissenting five members that they felt was important. "It is not responsible for leaders to put forth a theory and ask that others follow them if they have not thought through the implications and logical conclusions of their views, if they themselves are not willing to do what they advocate others to do," they wrote in regards to members not taking responsibility for how the implementation of ideas could affect the lives of people. A "secret" organization nor an organization with "open members" could change the path that the majority chose.<sup>634</sup> They stress that some of them still believed in alternatives of organization and revolution but at the time they do not believe in the ideals of Marxism Leninism to the core anymore. The feelings and emotions that went into dissolution created tension that still persists among former members. For some like Martinez they are still trying to grasp a more tangible reason why the League dissolved so suddenly beyond the events of Tiananmen Square. Despite these debates the League ultimately dissolved. This marked the end of the League as an organization which lasted from 1978-1990, placing it among the longer life cycles of New Communist organizations.

Despite the bitter arguments and personal attacks that happened at the end of the League's life many individuals still have fond memories of their time in the organization and acknowledge that what they learned in their past activist lives continue to influence their current lives. While some people felt burned out after the League dissolved and left social movements altogether, others entered academia where they have published critical scholarship in disciplines such as History, or they established community organizations that have trained future

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<sup>633</sup> Eva Martinez interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 30, 2018.

<sup>634</sup> "A Brief Response to the Paper by Five Central Committee Members, called "Moving Our Traditions Forward" By the Central Committee Majority."

generations of activists. Others entered environmental activism or continued to work in their respective labor unions. Critics of social movements, political pundits, and some scholars of social movement theory at times seek to measure organizations and movements based on success or failure. I believe the activism and influence of the League is difficult to measure because it continues till this day. Social movement theory shows that despite having losses in social movements, activists learn the tools and skills needed for the next battle they do participate in.<sup>635</sup> I argue this is exactly what happened to many of the League activists who in interviews have stressed that they learned how to speak in public, write speeches and articles, and ultimately organize with human social interaction skills they learned as members of either the ATM, the League, or both organizations. They have also engrained themselves within power structures and have resources that have allowed them to have some institutional power and control which they sought in the 1970s and 1980s as indicated throughout each chapter of this dissertation.

Individuals from the League have gone on to be active in other circles while some stepped away from social movement building. Bill Gallegos, for example is currently a leader in the environmental justice movement. In the recent past he has served as the Executive Director of Communities for a Better Environment (CBE). He has also served as a member of the Environmental Justice Advisory Committee that worked to help implement California's greenhouse gas legislation as well as being in the leadership of GREENLA, a coalition of environmental justice organizations.<sup>636</sup> Gallegos has lectured around the country in regards to how oppressed communities of color need to be integrated into the environmental justice movement. In a recent lecture at the University of Wisconsin titled, "How a Grassroots Movement of People of Color Defeated Chevron Oil in Richmond, California" it is clear that

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<sup>635</sup> David S. Meyer, "How Social Movements Matter" *Contexts*. 2, no. 4 (Fall 2003), 30-35.

<sup>636</sup> Accessed March 16, 2019 <https://climateone.org/people/bill-gallegos>

Gallegos did not leave activism after the dissolution of the League and integrates things such as the national question into his present work. He has also been a member of the Freedom Road Socialist organization which has existed since the 1990s and is a group some of the members of the League joined after dissolution.

Other individuals continued their work in the labor sector and many remained active in their unions. Cruz Olmeda Becerra, the first chairman of the ATM, became a leader in the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers Union into the present.<sup>637</sup>

Theresa Montaña also continued her labor organizing and currently serves as the Vice-President of the California Teachers Association. She is also currently a professor at California State University, Northridge in the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies where she teaches on bilingual education, Latino educational equity, and critical multicultural education.<sup>638</sup> The League for Montaña was a “training ground” that gave her the skills needed to become a “damn good organizer.” She became a good organizer in her opinion because it was through the League that she really learned how to “write, how to study” and how to organize. She also learned how to “build friendships and relationships” which she feels are all important parts of building a movement.

Other individuals in the League have gone on to establish key community institutions that provide spaces for the future generation of activists to organize around the issues related to their current experiences. Beto Flores along with his kids have established the Zapatista-inspired Eastside Café where he took me on a tour after our interview that has fought gentrification and serves as a multi-disciplinary, autonomous, cultural organizing space in Los Angeles’ eastside

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<sup>637</sup> Cruz Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 14, 2017.

<sup>638</sup> Accessed March 16, 2019. <https://www.csun.edu/humanities/chicana-chicano-studies/theresa-montano>

community of El Sereno.<sup>639</sup> The space is currently getting bigger and has plans to sell “Fuck Trump” Zapatista inspired coffee. Their vision includes being committed to the belief that “all people and all communities have the right to self-governance and self-determination,” and that the communities contain all the “knowledge and power” to make this a reality. They claim that they are not involved in a struggle for power, rather that communities already possess the power to “create a positive alternative to the struggles” facing them. Before helping open the autonomous space, Flores spent time in Chiapas on a Fulbright grant studying the Zapatista movement and its leadership style in the 1990s that arose in Mexico after the passing of the National Free Trade Agreement which he wrote a dissertation on.<sup>640</sup> He has also served as a professor in the Department of Chicana(o) and Latina(o) Studies at California State University, Los Angeles.

Eric Mann left the League in 1984 after his time working to keep the General Motors Van Nuys plant open. Mann, in large part with the connections he made during the campaign, opened the Labor Community Strategy Center in Los Angeles. The center was founded in 1989 as a think tank-act tank for “regional, national and international movement building” and they also hold courses teaching individuals how to become organizers. The group is rooted in “working class communities of color” and address the “totality of urban life with a particular focus on civil rights, environmental justice, public health, global warming, and the criminal legal system.”<sup>641</sup> They also have a book store which not only sells Mann’s long list of published scholarship, but also sells the writings of people such as Vladimir Lenin. When I interviewed Mann in the Strategy Center I first examined the books on the shelves which included Lenin’s *What is to Be*

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<sup>639</sup> Accessed March 16, 2019. <https://www.eastsidecafe.org>

<sup>640</sup> Roberto Gonzalez Flores, “Chican@ Artists and Zapatistas Walk Together Asking, Listening, Learning: The Role of Transnational Informal Learning Networks in the Creation of a Better World” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2008).

<sup>641</sup> Accessed March 16, 2019. <https://thestrategycenter.org>

*Done* which he feels is still important for today since African Americans and Chicana/os are still oppressed. This stresses what Mann feels is the continuation of the national question which he argues is still applicable. Mann also runs a radio show called Voices from the Frontlines which is a “national movement building show” on KPFK Pacifica in Los Angeles where he interviews scholars, activists, and organizers. Both Mann and Flores show how former League activists have created community spaces to continue helping organize communities of color and both their generation and younger generations of activists.

Individuals such as Eva Martinez took some time away from community organizing when the League dissolved. Eventually she received a job at the Journalism Center that was started at San Francisco State University by the journalism department. The Center for Integration and of Journalism began by looking at diversity issues of news coverage and in the newsroom and was led by Betty Medsgar who would become Martinez’s mentor. Medsgar infamously received the first set of COINTELPRO papers while she was a writer at the Washington Post and highlighted the break in of the FBI’s offices in her book *The Burglary*. Martinez used her clippings from a community newspaper called *El Tecolote* which still operates today in San Francisco’s Mission District. After our interview in which we had *pupusas* in the Mission District, Martinez gave me a tour of the area where the ATM and the League was active selling their newspapers and organizing the community. She also took me into the *El Tecolote* headquarters to meet with individuals she has organized with from younger generations. Martinez during this interview recalled that other League individuals also stayed working in Local 2 and that the union is what it is today because of the League. Martinez is also the leader of an online initiative to digitize League materials as well as oral histories conducted with former



members that will be a valuable addition to the history of activists from different communities of color that came together in the League.<sup>642</sup>

Many others like Ed Gallegos and Joe Navarro returned to their cultural production of music and poetry respectfully while also serving as K-12 educators. The reach of the League in regards to teaching extends from young children to some of the most elite college institutions across the country just among the Chicana/o members and is vaster when considering the other members from other nationalities that also are currently activists or professors. Their influence is thus difficult to trace since some have produced critical scholarship used as high as graduate seminars or have trained scholars across different disciplines including History, Education, and Chicana/o Studies. Teaching, however, is not limited to those that entered academia or the classrooms, rather, others continue to teach about things like environmental justice such as Bill Gallegos, or labor organizers such as Montaña, or within community spaces like Mann and Flores. It is for these reasons that the League continues to be a vital organization that was rooted first in the histories of cultural nationalist organizations like ATM, IWK, and the Revolutionary Communist League that scholars must engage with their various sectors of activism. They were involved in labor, education, and electoral politics among a host of other issues that still need to be explored. This dissertation mostly focuses on the Chicana/o members and primarily the Southwest despite the League being active in the Midwest, the South, and the East Coast. Their reach in those locations have ties to some of the more recent movements such as the Black Lives Matter Movement in St. Louis. Thus, these activists serve as generational leaders that are still active in promoting many of the ideas of social justice in the present that they believed in during their 1960s to 1990 period of organizational existence.

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<sup>642</sup> Eva Martinez interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 30, 2018.

The courage of these activists to reveal their lives to me also stresses a component of this dissertation that I did not believe was possible. When I first ventured on this project I believed that I would not achieve the names of any members believing that the groups were entirely clandestine. However, after archival research I began to notice that editors, authors, and open members began to appear on the pages of the League's *Unity* newspaper. I reached out and was granted the opportunity to interview activists in their homes, their community centers, or at a local food or coffee establishment. The current political climate in an age with chants of "Keep Socialism Out of America" leaves such activists vulnerable to political attacks even 20 years after the League dissolved. Websites such as Key-Wiki have been created that have profiles of some activists based on archival research and the cataloging of what historians or other scholars have written. It is no surprise that I was denied interviews by many former members, some of which were core activists in the ATM and the League. This is a clear vulnerability in this dissertation but I believe this silence speaks volumes in regards to the political climate around calling oneself a Marxist, communist, or another leftist political identity. I believe this is the strength and power that still permeates from repressive anti-communist policing such as that of McCarthyism, COINTELPRO, and political surveillance that existed during the 16 years of which the ATM and the League operated. This still very much influences the lives of Chicana/o communists.

Some of these members began their activist political lives as early as the 1960s and some have continued into the present. This 50-60-year political life cycle indicates the power of individuals to fight for social and structural change. In the face of oppression at the hands of monopoly capitalism and imperialism they sought better human rights, citizenship rights, and continue to fight for social justice.

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Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives Printed Ephemera Collection on Organizations, Tamiment Library, New York University, New York, NY.

Stanford Library Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA.

### **Newspapers and Periodicals**

*Basta Ya*

*Community News*

*El Obrero*

*Forward: Journal of Marxism-Leninism- Mao Zedong Thought: The Struggle for Chicano Liberation*

*Forward: Journal of Socialist Thought*

*Getting Together*

*Journal: The Political Organ of I Wor Kuen*

*La Voz Del Barrio*

*Nuestra Cosa*

*Revolutionary Cause*

*Red Banner*

*Unity and Struggle*

*Unity: Newspaper of the League of Revolutionary Struggle*

### **Interviews**

Arturo Diaz interview by Eddie Bonilla, February 28, 2018.

Beto Flores interview by Eddie Bonilla, August 14, 2017.

Bill Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 2, 2018.

Carlos Muñoz interview by Gerald Rosen, January 14, 1968, Chicano Students in Los Angeles [OHP 226] Center for Oral and Public History California State University, Fullerton.

Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Gerald Rosen on January 31, 1969, Chicano Students in Los Angeles [OHP 226] Center for Oral and Public History California State University, Fullerton.

Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Gerald Rosen, December 23, 1978, Chicano Students in Los Angeles [OHP 226] Center for Oral and Public History California State University, Fullerton.

Cruz Olmeda Becerra interview by Eddie Bonilla, June 16, 2017.

Ed Gallegos interview by Eddie Bonilla, February 19, 2018.

Eric Mann interview by Eddie Bonilla, May 2, 2018.

Eva Martinez interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 30, 2018.

Joe Navarro, interview by Eddie Bonilla, July 10, 2017.

Peter Shapiro interview by Eddie Bonilla, March 8, 2017.

Ralph Ramirez, interview by Gerald Rosen, November 1978, Chicano Students in Los Angeles [OHP 226] Center for Oral and Public History California State University, Fullerton.

Theresa Montaña interview by Eddie Bonilla, February 22, 2018.

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