Globalization and the Future of Radical Adult Education

John D. Holst
University of St. Thomas, Minnesota, USA


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Throughout most of the decade of the 1990s, it was widely held that socialist politics were, if not outright dead, at least, in near fatal crisis. At the beginning of the decade, marking 10 years of Reaganism-Thatcherism, the European socialist camp was quickly disintegrating. Socialist movements in power or on the verge of power in Central America were in retreat. Neoliberal structural adjustment programs were the norm for the Third World as welfare states were dismantled in the First World. Postmodernism, that was more than anything else an attack on Marxism, was all the rage in academia. In 1992, Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* declared the world to be forever capitalist, as many leftists and Marxist were finishing their journey from neo-Marxism, to Post-Marxism and on to anti-Marxism. The field of adult education, with its progressive tradition, was not immune to this retreat from traditional left politics. Jane Thompson’s (1993) ironic and sad “open letter to whoever’s left” captured the sense of defeat among radical adult educators.

Nevertheless, all of the capitalist class euphoria over globalization and postmodern-inspired smug cynicism did not last long. In 1992, Los Angeles erupted in one of the largest urban revolts in the history of the United States. On January 1, 1994, the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) greeted the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—a codification of transnational neoliberalism—with an armed seizure of major cities in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. The grand narrative of postmodernism began to lose steam by the mid-1990s—helped along in great part by Alan Skopal’s parody that slipped by the postmodernist editors of *Social Text* in 1996—and today stands merely as a trend within many fields including Adult Education. A growing student movement, environmental movement and reform trends within the labor movement reached a certain plateau and coalescence captured by the dramatic World Trade Organization protest in Seattle in 1999 and subsequent anti-globalization protests, including the first World Social Forum attended by over 12,000 in Porto Alegre, Brazil in January of 2001. While the crisis of socialism is far from over, and the fascist backlash following the events of September 11, 2001, is a setback, we are now in a very different political conjuncture 10 years on from the end of history.

Ironically, for a field such as adult education that does not have a long tradition of political economic analysis (see Youngman, 2000, pp. 33-34), the very force of the imposition of neoliberalism and the triumphalism of capitalism’s adherents has put political economy and the nature of capitalism at the center of adult educators’ analysis of the current period. At the core of this analysis is globalization. Twenty years of rightwing ascendance and leftwing retreat, however, have not left adult education in a very good theoretical or practical position to address the question of globalization. Postmodernism’s insistence on de-centering and fragmentation influenced the move in adult education toward localized nongovernmental organization (NGO) development initiatives and civil society theorizing rather than a focus on capitalism and on the state as an agent of globalization. These civil societarian (Welton, 1997) initiatives in the form of privatized community development have often times tailed neoliberalism rather than challenge its core principles.

Revitalizing the socialist tradition in adult education—the tradition that does not abandon the working class or its organizational potential and the goal of fundamental social transformation that goes beyond civil societarianism—must begin with the question of globalization. Challenging prevailing positions on globalization in the field can be done on many fronts. First, from a philosophical perspective, one can challenge the political-ideological backtracking from Marxism to Neo-Marxism to Post-Marxism and finally to variants of postmodernist anti-Marxism that underlie the move from advocating old social movements and
socialism to new social movements and civil societarianism in adult education (see Holst, 2002, for an example of this type of work). Second, from a political economic perspective one can challenge empirically the extent to which the world economy is truly globalized and the implications of this for political practice (see for example, Hirst & Thompson, 1999; Magdoff, 1998; Moody, 1997; “New Economy”, 2001; Sweezy, 1997; Tabb, 1997, 2001; Wood, 1997, 1998). Finally, and most importantly for this study, adult education is uniquely situated to contribute to this process of challenging dominant perspectives on globalization from the perspective of praxis. In other words, it is essential to investigate whether perspectives on globalization are emerging organically from organizations that are attempting to engage in political struggle that goes beyond the limitations of civil societarianism. Furthermore, it is important to see whether these perspectives on globalization are a part of or are shaped by the educational work of these organizations.

This paper will begin with a review of the literature on globalization within the field of adult education and then present the findings of ongoing research on the perspectives of globalization and social change and educational work within the US revolutionary organizations Freedom Road Socialist Organization and the League of Revolutionaries for a New America.

Globalization, Social Change and Adult Education: Recent Literature

Central to this literature review is an analysis of how perspectives of the globalization process affect people’s understanding of the prospect for social change, how this change should take place, and who are most likely to be the agents of this change. Salt, Cervero and Herod (2000), for example, in a study of worker education programs as responses to globalization argue that “their understanding of the term [globalization] fundamentally influences their programs’ content and delivery” (p. 19). In other words, the claim being made in this study is that one’s analysis of globalization sets limits on how one sees the process and profundity of social change.

HRD and Vocation Education

Within the literature on work-based education from a vocational or HRD perspective, there are three major themes that emerge regarding globalization and the challenges it poses. First, globalization and technology have fundamentally changed the nature of work in the last three decades. As Kerka (2000) states, “technological change and the globalization made possible largely by digital technology are the primary forces behind the restructuring and redistribution of work” (p. 3). Flexibility is the prevailing buzzword in describing the restructuring of work. More specifically, the realities of this flexibility in the Australian context—yet applicable to the first world generally—are captured by Church, Fontan, Ng, and Shragge (2000):

The redefinition of the labor market is linked to a number of global factors…Since the end of the seventies, technological changes and shifts in production to countries with cheap pools of labor have contributed to high levels of unemployment. The traditional unionized blue-collar job is diminishing replaced by irregular jobs in the service-sector—non unionized and low-wage….With post-Fordism, “just in time” production has required a flexible labor market unencumbered by permanent jobs, trade unions, and collective agreements. (pp. 5-6)
Flexibility means the replacement of relatively permanent, full-time, unionized jobs with temporary, part-time, non-union jobs.

Second, the changes in the nature of work resulting from globalization are as inevitable as globalization itself. In this light, McLean (2001) sets out the tasks of HRD in the era of globalization.

I have concluded...that the march to globalization is inevitable....If you accept this premise, then it seems that the question for HRD is not, “How can we stop globalization?” but, rather, “How can we support a globalization process that minimizes exploitation and truly works for the wellbeing of all of humanity. (p. 22).

It should be noted that while McLean mentions minimizing exploitation, his nine steps that HRD can take in the light of globalization have to do almost exclusively with helping “organizations [capital] succeed in globalization”. In an extensive review of the literature on vocational education, Butler and Ferrer (2000) conclude that,

overwhelmingly this literature presents the changes [socio-economic] as unavoidable and beneficial in the long term, once short-term challenges have been met and so-called necessary adjustments made. The apparent consensus is that survival and prosperity in the new world require us to be ‘realistic’, to change the things we do and the way we do them. (p. 9).

Third, if as McLean argues that “neither corporations, world federations..., or even governments can control the process of globalization” (p. 19), then the role of adult education should be one of helping organizations and workers adapt to the new flexible world of work. It is precisely in this context that we can understand the emergence of the idea of life-long learning. “Against the background of globalization, there is a significant move toward a permanent interface between production and learning processes in organizations” (Hake, 1999, p. 84).

Adult education, as lifelong learning, or more honestly described as lifelong adaptation to the needs of capital, is based on a largely uncritical assumption that work in the “new economy” will be increasingly high-skill work. Specifically, the globalization-technology-skills-education linkage is summarized well by Spence (1999):

The globalization of the economy and rapid technological innovation challenge today’s workforce to prepare for continuous change. Due to technological innovation and the restructuring of the workplace, many workers have found that their current technical skills are obsolete....To address these problems, members of the work force must commit themselves to lifelong learning to update their technical skills and develop problem-solving skills. (p. 3).

There are two major shortcomings in the vocational and HRD oriented literature on globalization. First, former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich (1992) went far in perpetuating the myth of an ever-increasing need for high skilled “symbolic analysts” or knowledge workers in the new economy; a myth uncritically taken up by many adult educators (see Mojab, 2001 for an exception to this trend). Ironically, it was under Reich’s leadership that the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) issued a report largely dispelling this myth when it projected the fastest growing occupations from 1996 to 2006, few of which could be classified as high skill; these projections from the BLS have remained largely consistent since the 1995 report under Reich (see for example, Hecker, 2001).

Second, given that HRD and vocational education generally view workplace education and learning from a management perspective, when coupled with the prevailing notion that globalization is inevitable, the practical choices become limited to using education as a way to
adapt participants to the needs of capital on capital’s terms, with the occasional call for ethical practice and the consideration of the most vulnerable. Adapting capital to the needs of labor is simply outside the paradigm. We are left then with the continuation of the “learning for earning paradigm”, critiqued by Cunningham (1993) over a decade ago, merely updated for the era of globalization.

*Radical Adult Education*

I am using the term “radical adult education” to encompass all the strands within the field that are explicitly dedicated to investigating, promoting or engaging in adult education for progressive, social democratic or socialist transformation. Using this frame of reference, within radical adult education we find two broad perspectives on globalization and social change.

**Civil societarian perspectives.** The dominant position is what I have referred to above as civil societarianism. In terms of globalization, this perspective has several premises that are at times explicitly and at other times not so explicitly linked. First, it is generally claimed that globalization marks a qualitatively new epoch. The world is currently in transition from one paradigm to another. The dominant paradigm has been that of modernization, and we would suggest that we are shifting to a new paradigm of globalization. This has major implications for our understanding of ‘progress’ and for notions of civil society, the state, the market and their relationships to one another. (Amutabi et al., pp. 1-2, 1997)

Second, the power of the nation-state is questioned. The claim is that in the age of globalization, the nation-state has been overrun by vastly more powerful multinational corporations (MNCs) and transnational corporations (TNCs). It is often quoted how the economic holdings or activity of some of the largest of these corporations are larger than the GDP of many countries (see for example, Miles, 2002). The words of Elayne Harris (1996) are exemplary of a position held by others (Beveridge, 1996; Cruikshank, 1997; Cunningham, 1996, 1998; Korsgaard, 1997; Sumner, 2000).

The global economy and marketplace have eroded not only the nation states’ ability to control their own monetary and fiscal policies, but also their economic and political sovereignty….Now it is MNCs and TNCs, not governments, who are at the helm. (p. 6)

Third, parallel to and intersecting with this globalization perspective is the growth in the cottage industry of civil society theorizing. If the old nation-state—nostalgically remembered for its once relative generosity in terms of monies for adult education in its Northern welfare state and Southern developmentalist varieties—is weakened to the point of no longer being able to carry out adult education projects, or be a worthwhile target for capture by more radical versions of political struggle, then the focus of adult educators should turn toward the realm of civil society. As Welton (2001) argues, “economic globalization’s fantastic capacity to compress space and time relations in its transactions places serious stress on formal political systems [states]…and awakens civil society to its saliency in the global era” (p. 50). One of the conclusions from the lauded 1997 CONFINTSEA V conference in Hamburg, moreover, was that “adult learning needs to promote an active civil society” (UNESCO, 1999, p. 10). The turn toward civil society is often justified with what I would argue is a misguided dialectical conceptualization of the local as the opposite of the global in the context of globalization. Korsgaard (1997), for example, in describing the qualitative change from the international era to the globalization era says,
Historically and conceptually the word international is connected with the word national and is based on the assumption that the decisive actors...are stable national states....The word global on the other hand is not counterpoised in the same way, but is contrasted with the word local. (p. 10).

Harris (1996), places this in a more practical context. “As a way to level the effects of globalization, we need to strengthen local democracy” (p. 9).

More recently, the idea that adult education should confront globalization through building localized organizations of civil society has been combined with the importance of global links through the idea of a global civil society. Budd Hall (2000), building on Welton’s theories of civil society, is one of the most prominent advocates of this idea. He argues that global civil society is comprised of all the nation- and region-based civil society organizations and structures in combination with global organizations of which international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) play a leading role (pp. 11-13).

Marxian Perspectives. While the civil societarian perspective on the nature of globalization and ways to confront it is dominant within radical adult education, there is a significant grouping of individuals who have presented an analysis of globalization from a specifically Marxian perspective. Central to this analysis are several factors. First, the idea that we are in a qualitatively new globalized post-industrial economic epoch is challenged. One of the problems with the term globalization is that it can hide the fact that we are talking about capitalism. And when we look at the economic data on world capitalist production it can be argued “what is occurring is not some dramatic shift in the global economy but rather a solidifying of long established patterns” (Brown, 1999, p. 14). Specifically, challenging the post-industrial claim, Murphy (2000) says,

Certainly changes have occurred in the economic structure of modern society. However these are quantitative, not qualitative. The changes are due to the fact that society has become more industrialized, rather than making a qualitative leap into a post-industrial society. (p. 173).

It is generally argued from this perspective that what we are witnessing is not qualitative change but merely the quantitative internationalization of capitalist relations, not a seamless globalized economy. Moreover, changes that we have seen, mainly the triumph of neoliberalism, are due to and are fundamentally dependent upon the active role of the nation-state in conjunction with corporate interests, what Mojab (2001) calls a “market-state bloc”. More specifically, Foley (1996) describes neoliberalism or “economic rationalism” as “a clearly political process [with] governments deliberately restructuring their economies in ways which benefit capital and disadvantage most of their citizens” (p. 43). While the notion that globalization is a human endeavor, not some economically deterministic process outside of our control, is recognized by civil societarians, they downplay the continued power of the state in advancing neoliberalism or in curtailing it, what Murphy calls “the end of politics” (p. 170). This is particularly frustrating since as Brown (1999) argues “at the very time that the state guarantees capital’s easier access to both internal and external accumulation it is argued that it is no longer an important site of struggle” (p. 13).

Assessing Radical Adult Education Perspectives. I would like to point out weaknesses I see in both the civil societarian and the Marxist perspectives that have general implications for advancing our understanding of globalization, social change and radical adult education.

While the critique of civil societarian perspectives of globalization implicit in the Marxist perspective is compelling for its sophisticated use and advocacy of political economy, it is
generally lacking in three areas. First, the local/global dialect is insufficiently problematized in Marxist critiques of civil societarian perspectives. This dialectic supposedly helps explain theoretically the postmodernistic fragmentation and plurality of reality today. In addition, from the standpoint of practice, this dialectic informs us that we should challenge globalization by focusing on the local. The problem with this global/local conceptualization is that it misses the mark in understanding the dialectical process of change within capitalism. The fundamental contradictions within capitalism are not external relations (global/local), but contradictory relations internal to the process of capitalism itself that manifest themselves through the long history of the vertical (creating market relations where none existed previously) and horizontal (territorial) expansions of capitalism that today are commonly placed under the label of globalization. For Allman (2001)

when we conceptualize things in terms of internal relations, we focus on the inner relation between the two entities or opposites and how the nature of that relation shapes and regulates or determines the internal development of the attributes inherent to each of the opposites….We also focus on the results that develop out of this process of shaping and determining, results that normally serve to “mediate” or bind the two opposites within the relation….These results are also what we immediately perceive rather than the internal relation of the opposites, and in this way they tend to mediate or mask the relation from which they originate. (p. 42)

She adds that the “concept of internal relations underpins Marx’s entire explanation of capitalism” (p. 43). The most fundamental of these internal relations or contradictions are: a) capital/labor; b) production/circulation; and c) social forces/social relations of production (Allman, ch. 2). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a summary of these contradictions and the implications for social change (see Peery, 2002), we need to understand that the contradiction of the global and the local is the result of the continuous development of the internal contradictions of capitalism, and in order to overcome the global/local contradiction, we must critically understand and struggle against the internal relations of capitalism from which it emerges. This is what Allman (1999) calls moving from a limited/reproductive praxis to a critical/revolutionary praxis.

Second, while some have challenged the notion—often present in some form in civil societarian perspectives—that globalization is an inevitable and uncontrollable force by pointing to the continued role of the nation-state in making the specific policy changes that allow for globalization processes, analysis of the role of the nation-state remains undeveloped. Milani (2002) does address in broad outline, the type of state and regulation needed in what he calls a “postindustrial socialism”, but this assumes a very high level and universality of technology with accompanying infrastructure to support it that is only present in the First World. Since the Left in general has largely abandoned state theory since the famed Miliband/Poulantzas debates of the 1970s, we are not in a very strong position to assess the role of the state; this is particularly unfortunate among adult educators since we are often state actors. Specifically, what has gone particularly under-theorized among adult educators and the left generally, is the continued power of the state, particularly in some highly visible Third World examples, to control or at least manage the forces of globalization (see Weiss, 1998, for an exception to this trend). Why is no one in adult education making a critical analysis of the Cuban state as a powerful example of what a state can do in terms of maintaining social programs such as education and staying in control of foreign investment? Cuba stands as a daily slap-in-the-face to neoliberal ideologues who call for structural adjustment, privatization schemes. Elsewhere in Latin America, the
recent presidential electoral victories of Lula in Brazil, Chávez in Venezuela, and Gutiérrez in Ecuador, on platforms of varying degrees of rejection of the neoliberal model, point to the fact that it is only through the nation-state that the Third World can fight the annexation process implicit in neoliberal globalization policies directed by the United States. The fundamental question in all these cases is who controls the state, and we can see the state’s continued power when in the hands of popular forces or those acting on behalf of the popular classes. The great concern of the US government with these electoral victories in Latin America is the future of the neoliberal Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The US is now facing the possibility that three Latin American nation-states (plus Cuba that has been left out of the FTAA initiative) will not turn over their sovereignty, and in fact may use it to develop an alternative model to neoliberalism. Clearly, it is the state—along with the balance of forces behind it—that is key in this struggle. Moreover, in large part, the sin of George Bush’s “axis of evil” states is their refusal to follow the neoliberal mandates of the globalizing institutions of the World Bank and the IMF.

Also problematic are the theoretical foundations of civil societarian perspectives in terms of the analysis of the state and civil society itself. Welton (2001), for example, accurately states that “most theorists of civil society argue that the concept no longer includes the economy” (p. 55). This largely arbitrary demarcation of social reality is a sharp departure from the long history of Marxist analysis of the state and civil society. It seems empirically and theoretically untenable to mark off a significant area of social existence outside the reach of the state and capital relations in capitalist society. This is increasingly untenable in this so-called era of globalization characterized by the horizontal and vertical expansion of capitalist relations. The family, the neighborhood, community organizations, public gathering places, etc., are all regulated from their very creation and formation by the state and largely subject to the laws of capitalism.

Apart from the theoretical problems associated with demarcating social spheres outside the state and economic relations, the practical implications of this lead straight down the road of reformism. The civil societarian perspectives of globalization and the localized challenges to it that these perspectives propose are compelling in that they in many ways continue the liberal/social democratic traditions at the heart of much of the long history of adult education. Furthermore, the literature of adult education, especially in journals such as Convergence and Adult Education and Development, is filled with examples of how adult education/community development projects try piece-by-piece to build civil society. The problem, however, is that the reapplication of what Marjorie Mayo (1995) calls the “(broken) wheel of community-based strategies” will not overcome globalization. The practical conclusions of this strategy are to leave the state to the ruling classes and to struggle along the lines of what can only be described as leftwing neoliberalism to the extent that civil societarian practice in its developmentalist approaches fills the social service vacuum left by the retreat of the welfare state as it focuses increasingly on the militarization of domestic and foreign policies. As argued above, the state is still central to the politics and economics of society today, yet civil societarian theory and practice ignores this fact for a concentration on “scale[d] down…aspirations for the 21st century” (Welton, p. 61).

Finally, the Marxist perspectives are largely successful in exposing many of the shortcomings in the civil societarian theories of globalization and point to how we should analyze the current period and with what analytical tools that can lead radical adult education beyond the social democratic impasse of civil societarianism. These perspectives, however, are
sorely lacking in examples of alternative organizational forms or political practices of an explicitly Marxist or revolutionary perspective to match the plethora of case studies on civil societarian NGO initiatives. Ironically, for a sub-field within adult education that is enamored with a communist like Antonio Gramsci, there is almost no documented research on communist or socialist parties or revolutionary organizations. While Marxists can rightly argue that the civil societarian perspective with its call for localized grassroots initiatives is a form of left-wing neoliberalism, they have generally not provided the organizational or practical alternatives to civil societarian perspectives. Therefore, the next step must be to provide the practical examples of organizations that can and are moving people toward what Allman (2001) calls a revolutionary/critical praxis.

Globalization Perspectives and Educational Work in Two Revolutionary Organizations

Before presenting findings on the education work of the two organizations I am working with, it is important to outline their histories and analyses of globalization.

*Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO).*

*Background.* FRSO has its origins in several organizations of what is known as the New Communist Movement (NCM) of the late 1960s and early 1970s. According to Max Elbaum (2002), the NCM involved approximately 10,000 core activists of the various social movements of the time who sought to go beyond what they believed were the limitations of the overly anarchistic and spontaneous New Left organizations and the revisionist Marxism of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) by building Marxist-Leninist organizations with varying degrees of affiliation with Mao Tse Tung thought (pp. 3-5). It should be noted that beyond Elbaum’s estimate of 10,000 core activists, the various NCM organizations influenced many more thousands of activists in the various social movements. The NCM was comprised of several revolutionary currents: oppressed nationality movements; the student movement and particularly the Marxist and Marxist-Leninist Collectives that emerged across the country out of the Revolutionary Youth Movement II which formed from the demise of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS); and former CPUSA anti-revisionist members (M. Kelly, personal communication, November 21, 2002). The various NCM organizations led significant social struggles in the early and mid 1970s, but due to their immaturity and large middle class contingency, they made many ultra-left mistakes characterized by an impatience for the development of revolutionary conditions that did not come to pass and subsequently many activists left the movement (M. Kelly, personal communication, November 21, 2002). The organization called Freedom Road Socialist Organization was founded in 1985 with the merger of two NCM organizations: the Proletarian Unity League and the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters; this was followed by mergers with the Organization for Revolutionary Unity and the Amilcar Cabral/Paul Robeson Collective. In 1993, the Socialist Organizing Network merged into FRSO. All of these mergers gave FRSO direct ties to the labor movement, the liberation movements of oppressed nationalities (Chicano and African American) and oppressed national minorities (Asian/Asian American, Puerto Rican), the LGBT (Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender) movements, the anti-imperialist movement and the student movement. In 1999, FRSO suffered a split and there are currently two separate organizations identifying themselves as FRSO. The organization that I am working with can be identified by
the title of its newspaper, *Fight Back*, and when I discuss FRSO in this paper I will be referring to this organization.

It was in part the organization’s identity that FRSO-*Fight Back* felt was at stake in the “political and organizational crisis” (FRSO, 1999, ¶ 1) that led to the split. Specifically, the split had its origins in the organization’s analysis of the “crisis of socialism” and the correct response to it by revolutionaries in the United States. Out of this analysis, a section of the organization wrote and organized around a document called Theses on Left Refoundation (FRSO, n.d.) that according to FRSO-*Fight Back* (1999) challenged the core of FRSO’s identity.

A right wing section of our organization adopted the standpoint of social democracy and anti-communism, and…said there was no socialist movement that met their criteria of what a revolutionary movement should be…so it was their task to “refound it”. They said that Marxism-Leninism was a failure, as well as an obstacle to building socialism, and that a “new revolutionary theory” was needed. (¶ 6)

Out of this crisis, FRSO-*Fight Back* (1997) maintained the original identity of the organization as a revolutionary socialist and Marxist-Leninist organization seeking to apply revolutionary theory in our mass work that draws from the rich revolutionary traditions of Mao Tse Tung thought, as well as from the theories of revolutionary nationalism, revolutionary feminism and environmentalism. (¶ 6)

*Structure.* FRSO is organized geographically and around areas of work. At the base of the organization are Units. Units consist of three to seven members in the same locality working in the same or similar areas of work (e.g., urban poor, labor). Units meet every week or every two weeks and each Unit has a chair. Districts are geographically organized bodies consisting of the Units in a particular area. The Districts may span a fairly wide area such as Minnesota and Madison. When there is more than one Unit in a District, a District committee is formed consisting of the Unit chairs in a District. The Districts meet once a month. There is a National Executive Committee that meets four times a year and acts as the executive body of the organization between Congresses. Congresses are the highest decision-making body of the organization and are convened about every three years. All members are invited to a Congress, but only proportionally elected delegates from the Districts have voting rights. FRSO also has national Commissions and Work Teams that are based on the major areas of work (e.g., labor, oppressed nationalities, Colombia, etc.). The commissions unite people across units and districts working in similar areas. The Commissions and Work Teams meet every year or every two years.

While FRSO believes that a vanguard party is necessary for the working class to take power in the United States and for the liberation of the oppressed nationalities within the current boundaries of the United States, as the name implies, FRSO is a Marxist-Leninist organization and not a vanguard party or party. FRSO is not a vanguard party because they, following Lenin, understand that in order to be a vanguard, a party must lead masses of people from within the various mass movements. The notion of a vanguard being a small elite of intellectuals at the front of the working class has nothing to do with Lenin’s (1902/1970, pp. 106-112) notion of a vanguard party or FRSO’s.

We believe in a vanguard party, a proletarian party, but we also believe that that has to be based on a large party that really is in and able to lead huge sections of peoples’ movements….We don’t see ourselves [FRSO] as being there. We see what we are doing as work that we hope will lay the groundwork for a party in the US. We hope that
our organization will either develop to be one of many organizations that end up being that very thing, but we wouldn’t call ourselves that at this point. (J. Sundin, personal communication, July 2, 2002).

**Strategy.** Drawing from Mao Tse Tung thought, FRSO (2001b) insists, unlike the LRNA as we will see below, that “the contradiction between the Third World and imperialism is the principal contradiction on a world scale” (¶ 37). This stance is also reflective of the fact that the chief “storm center of revolution is and remains in the Third World; it’s not in Western Europe, certainly not in the United States (M. Kelly, personal communication, November 21, 2002). Globally, therefore, FRSO emphasizes national liberation struggles where Marxists are a leading force (i.e., Colombia, Palestine, Philippines). FRSO also defends nonsocialist nations facing direct attack from the imperialist powers. So, for example, FRSO vigorously opposed the NATO war on Yugoslavia, the war against Afghanistan and the continuing attacks on Iraq.

[W]e don’t necessarily see those as places that, through what they are doing, might change history in the immediate future—we think that every place that imperialism isn’t in control is a good thing. While it is certainly critical support, we support those regimes as far as they resist imperialism. (J. Sundin, personal communication, July 2, 2002)

FRSO is not, however by any means, merely an international solidarity organization, protesting US foreign policy. Any orientation toward the Third World by FRSO merely reflects the fact that FRSO’s analysis of capitalism in its monopoly stage (Imperialism) points them to the Third World as the most likely spot for significant defeats of imperialism in the world today. Moreover, FRSO sees the struggle of Third World nations against imperialism related to class struggle in the US in two ways. First, every defeat for US imperialism abroad (as foreign policy), weakens imperialism (as monopoly capitalism) in the US.

[W]e do see each defeat for the US as a defeat that makes it a little weaker against us….[T]he weaker the US hold on the world is….and the more they have to fight to hold on to it, the weaker they are against the class struggle here. (J. Sundin, personal communication, July 2, 2002)

Second, the oppressed nationality liberation movements (African Americans, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans) in the US are also anti-imperialist national liberation struggles. FRSO is active in these movements although this work takes the form of struggle around the direct needs of these communities rather on anti-war, anti-intervention work that challenges the global reach of US imperialism.

Given the principal contradiction on the world scale between the Imperialist powers and the oppressed peoples of the world, the most basic strategy of FRSO is to build a united front against imperialism. To the extent that globalization is understood as imperialism in the Leninist sense, as FRSO understands it, globalization is the central focus of their work. The united front concept for FRSO (2001a) means “a broad united front of all forces aligned against imperialism” (¶ 14). FRSO works toward this united front by seeking “unity with a variety of progressive and revolutionary movements in the US….by building mass movements that bring people into progressive activism and introduce them to socialist politics and organization” (¶ 15). FRSO is active in what have been called “old social movements”, such as the labor movement, and “new social movements”, such as the women’s, environmental, LGBT movements and identity movements (what FRSO would called oppressed nationality and oppressed minority liberation movements). FRSO does not uphold the strong ‘old vs. new’ dichotomy used by many postmodernist academics (Boggs, 1986; Cohen, 1985; Finger, 1989; Laclau & Mouffe, 1987; Melucci, 1981; Welton, 1993) when looking at social movements. For FRSO, while they
prioritize work in the labor and nationality movements, they see all mass struggles as necessary elements for a broad united front.

For FRSO, the concept of a united front against imperialism must be based on the conditions of the US; this can be seen in the specific characteristics that FRSO believes a united front must take in the US context. Since FRSO (1997) “has always held that national oppression and white supremacy are the linchpin of capitalist rule” (¶ 1) in the US, then, the “strategic alliance of the working class (represented by its most oppressed sections) and the national movements” (¶ 2) must be at the heart of a united front. The idea of “national movements” and “national liberation”—generally referred to as the “national question”—in the revolutionary movement in the US, dates back to at least the debates leading up to the Sixth Congress of the Communist International in 1928 that resolved that African Americans (Negroes) had a right to national self-determination in the Black Belt southeast area of the US where historically, and up to present times, the majority of African Americans have lived (see Foner & Shapiro, 1991). Among specifically African American organizations and movements, the idea of national liberation as a strategy for African American liberation, has an even longer history going back to the early-to-mid 1800s. Beyond, viewing the Black Belt area of the southeast US as a historically created oppressed African American nation, FRSO also sees the southwest area of the US, annexed in the war against Mexico in 1848, as the oppressed Chicano nation of Aztlán. Native American nations, Hawaii and Puerto Rico also constitute oppressed nations with the right to national self-determination (see FRSO, 1991). FRSO, then, sees their work in building the various national movements as anti-imperialist work as much as their work in opposing US foreign policy though it takes on characteristics that reflect the felt needs of the oppressed nationality communities (J. Sundin, personal communication, July 2, 2002).

**Analysis of globalization.** In developing its analysis, FRSO draws on a variety of sources. All of the following sources are used in varying degrees depending upon the specific issue or aspect of monopoly capitalism under study. The classic works of Marxism-Leninism are foundational for providing analytical tools. The major figures FRSO (2001a) looks to are Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao. It must be emphasized that the use of the “classics” is not a mechanical application; the analytical tools they provide are used to the extent that they help in elucidating the current state of globalization in its historical context. In addition, they draw from Amilcar Cabral, Fidel Castro and Ho Chi Minh; along with Marxist-Leninists from the US such as William Z. Foster and Harry Haywood and the revolutionary nationalist Malcolm X. In the case of globalization Lenin’s (1939) five essential features of imperialism are a starting point.

More specifically, however, and beyond the classic texts, there are several sources from which FRSO draws in its analysis of globalization or imperialism. First, in analyzing a particular situation such as Colombia, FRSO analyzes the objective aspects such as the actual socio-political economic interests of the US in Colombia as well as the subjective factors such as the role of the US military, the Colombian state and the guerilla. Third, FRSO believes it is very important to draw on the analyses provided by the Marxist forces on the ground, such as the FARC in Colombia. Fourth, FRSO draws critically on the mainstream media. Fifth, in their active work within mass movements in the US, FRSO draws heavily on what the masses themselves raise. I will take this up further below in the section on educational work. Lastly, it is interesting to note that FRSO does not draw too often from academic Marxist work.

A lot of times we’ve found that [academic Marxism] tends to be anti-Leninist. A lot of it may be Marxist, but it ignores the importance of the peoples’ movements and of
organization, so we feel a lot of that is hard for us to apply because that’s not how we see the world. (J. Sundin, personal communication, July 2, 2002)

For FRSO, globalization is not a qualitative new stage in capitalism. Some individuals and organizations have attempted to define globalization and neoliberalism as new phenomenon, distinct and separate from imperialism. In fact, these phenomena are not new. Where they represent something particular to the last decade the difference is quantitative, and not in any way fundamental. (Yorek & Kelly, 2001, ¶ 18).

Specifically, FRSO points to the fact that capital and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is concentrated in the three main imperialist blocs of the US, the European Union and Japan (Yorek & Kelly, 2001, ¶ 19).

For FRSO, what we see as globalization today is a continuation of imperialism in its monopoly stage as outlined by Lenin (1939). Relevant still are the 5 essential features of imperialism that Lenin provided:

1. The concentration of production and capital developed to such a high stage that it created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life. (2) The merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this “finance capital”, of a “financial oligarchy”. (3) The export of capital, which has become extremely important, as distinguished from the export of commodities. (4) The formation of international capitalist monopolies which share the world among themselves. (5) The territorial division of the whole world among the greatest capitalist powers is completed.

Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development in which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital has established itself; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun; in which the division of all territories of the globe among the greatest capitalist powers has been completed. (p. 89)

Since “globalization” is a continuation of capitalism in its imperialist and monopoly stage, FRSO believes it is important to challenge the very label of “globalization” because it semantically moves us from an analysis of the continuing fundamental role of the state in monopoly capitalism or imperialism. Losing the focus on imperialism and turning to a term like ‘globalization’ leads to two misconceptions. First, the idea of globalization often leads people to argue that the technological revolution has created a seamless world economy while, according to FRSO, the technological revolution has merely aided in the intensification of the continuously unequal political economic relations between the big imperialist powers of the US, western Europe and Japan, and the peoples of the Third World (FRSO, 2001b). Second, the idea of globalization also leads to a characterization of the struggle against globalization as one between the global capitalist and the global worker divested of national boundaries. This is reflected in the emphasis on fighting corporate power so prevalent in the anti-globalization movement.

While it is correct to challenge corporations, this should be done from the perspective that realizes the fundamental role of states and militaries as the protectorates of corporate power. FRSO equates this erroneous analysis to Kautsky’s (1914/2002) idea of super-imperialism and the idea that capital would become one reformable international entity (Yorek & Kelly, 2001, ¶ 35 - 39). In other words, the term globalization “oftentimes is used to separate the economics from the politics in the discourse among activists” (J. Sundin, personal communication, July 2, 2002). In the case of Colombia, for example, “Coca-Cola might do a lot of payoffs, but it’s the military that on a day-to-day basis is implementing [oppressive] policies” (J. Sundin, personal communication, July 2, 2002). Moreover, the fact that capitalism develops unevenly is lost in
the idea of global capitalists divorced from specific states. FRSO argues that in many areas of the planet, capitalist relations operate side-by-side with semi-feudal relations. Ignoring this fact misses the significant role of the peasantry as a revolutionary force. “This is left out in a world view that sees only Nike and sweatshops (Yorek & Kelly, 2001, ¶ 40).

*Educational work.* The principal work of FRSO through its members is to be active in the mass movements, with a priority placed on oppressed nationality movements and movements of the multinational working class of the US. It is within the context of this “mass work” then, that we can understand the educational work of FRSO. In general, FRSO begins with the following epistemological principles: a) the people make history; b) general contradictions reside in particular situations or contradictions; c) people learn through doing (practice) and the summation of their practice; d) the correctness of ideas or theory is determined by practice. Given these premises, FRSO believes they must be immersed in the mass struggles of the people in order to be relevant. Within these movements, FRSO actively tries to build the left poles by raising people’s level of understanding; recruits what it sees as the most advanced sectors of these various movements; and actively seeks to win concrete gains through struggle. All of these activities in the mass movements have educational elements based on their epistemological principles. So, for example, in trade union work, to fight for day-to-day demands can be analyzed from the context of how these particular struggles are part of the larger struggle between the working class and the capitalist class. By engaging in these particular struggles, FRSO not only works alongside people in winning gains and changing the course of history, but it also can educate about the larger, general context in which these struggles are fought out. By summing up this practical work with others, FRSO can work with people to more systematically understand how they can draw lessons (learn) from their actions and test their ideas of appropriate strategy and tactics.

In an organizational document that directly addresses the issue of globalization FRSO outlines the “mass line” which is their basic political and organizational method and also contains core elements of their educational and epistemological philosophies.

In dealing with misconceptions about corporate globalization, we need to apply the mass line…[U]nder no circumstance should we pit ourselves against those in motion to resist corporate globalization. Rather we should work side-by-side with them and patiently explain things. Mao made the point: "In all practical work of our Party, all correct work in necessarily 'from the masses, to the masses.' This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in action.” To put this another way, we use Marxism to sum up where people are at. Basing ourselves on what people are concerned about, on what folks actually want, we develop slogans, policies, plans, ways to fight back, that people will take up as their own. (Yorek & Kelly, 2001)

If we return to the structure of FRSO we can see how their educational work is done at the different levels of the organization. The Units contain a small number of people working in a common area such as trade union work. The bulk of these meetings is taken up with discussion of the mass work which is a form of informal learning for the members to the extent that they collectively engage in analysis of strategy and tactics to further the particular mass movement in which they are working. In addition specific nonformal study on a topic is incorporated into Unit meetings on a regular basis. The topics may be chosen by Unit members or by the chair if
he or she sees a theoretical weakness expressed in the mass work of the Unit members. So for example a Unit chair may feel that the members are not sufficiently grasping the general contradiction in the daily work of the mass movement and set aside time to discuss this concept and its application to the mass work of the Unit. Another form of Unit educational work are the advanced recruitment studies. In these studies, the Unit organizes a study session on a particular topic and invites non-members from the mass work organizations to participate. The idea of these studies is to work more closely with those FRSO considers the most advanced and consistent members of the mass organization with which a Unit is working, with the goals of possibly recruiting people for membership in FRSO and advancing the mass movement through more formal applied theoretical study. FRSO has basic topics it selects from for these studies (dialectics, mass line, class/class struggle, the national question, imperialism, etc.) relevant to the particular mass organization and context within which the organization is working.

Monthly District meetings have similar educational aspects as Unit meetings. Since a major part of District meetings is summation of the mass work of the Units in the District, informal learning takes place as unit chairs are required to collectively and systematically analyze the progress of mass work within the District. Moreover, District meetings also include a nonformal education. This can be a discussion of a topic based on specific discussion questions or it can consist of the reading of a classic text with discussion questions. Once a year, Districts conduct cadre schools based on readings and presentations. These are generally half day or full day sessions covering anywhere from two to four topics. Districts also produce leaflets or pamphlets and hold open public forums on specific issues relevant to mass work of Unit members in the district and the larger public. Examples would include public forums on anti-war activity or a particular union’s current struggles. District planning sessions held on a regular basis are a more intense form of informal learning for members in that they assess a longer period of mass work and plan future directions for Unit mass work. Four times a year, Districts are required to submit a written report to the National Executive Committee (NEC). These reports are collective endeavors that require the District members to synthesize the work of the District over the last quarter.

After each quarterly meeting, the NEC issues an Internal Bulletin which contains a report of the NEC meeting, any recent reports from Commissions, the reports of each District and any recent Unit summations. The Internal Bulletin is issued to each member. The NEC is also responsible for publishing the newspaper Fight Back. The newspaper is currently published four times a year and contains coverage of mass movement activity. Most of the reporting is from units members writing on their mass work. Some articles are written by advanced nonmembers of the organization and at times coverage is done on movements in which FRSO is not working. FRSO ensures that the newspaper is written at an 8th grade level. The role of the newspaper in FRSO’s work varies from Unit to Unit. In some Units the newspaper, due to its coverage of that particular Unit’s work is intimately tied to the mass work and acts as a direct tool in furthering the particular movement, organization or trade union. This is most common in some of the unions in which FRSO is actively involved. In other Units Fight Back is used to introduce people of a particular mass movement to politics and struggle of other movements. So for example, in anti-war movements, Fight Back due to its coverage of a variety of mass movements, shows anti-war activity along side struggles of oppressed nationalities and working people through the trade unions. (J. Sundin, personal communication, July 2, 2002)

Finally, in all of FRSO’s nonformal educational activities at the Unit or District level there is an emphasis on using techniques of popular education. In recent years the influence of
popular education has come from FRSO members’ work in Latin America or Latin American solidarity organizations. FRSO sees the techniques of popular education as very important for two reasons. First, many of the members of FRSO or activists they work closely with in mass movements such as in the urban poor movements have low literacy levels. In these situations reading classic texts with discussion questions, while successful with members with many years of schooling, is not an effective way to educate. Secondly, and more from an epistemological standpoint, the idea of the mass line, is to work directly with and from the lived experiences of the masses, therefore, it is necessary to use educational techniques that are based on their reality. The main feature is that it’s interactive, that it derives from people’s lived experiences and knowledge that people bring with them, whether they’ve read an article or not. Then we usually try to involve some different creative tactics to engage people and to even the playing field….A whole section of our comrades are from the urban poor….Sometimes some of [the] texts are very accessible because the concepts are really familiar to people but sometimes reading is a barrier or sometimes that kind of discussion is, so we’ll really focus on trying to come up with questions that work with people based on their own knowledge so [our education work is] real specific to the different areas of work or struggle we’re engaged in. (J. Sundin, personal communication, July 2, 2002)

League of Revolutionaries for a New America (LRNA)

Background. LRNA has a longer organization history than FRSO. LRNA has its initial roots among individuals who quit or were expelled from the CPUSA in the mid-1950s. One of these individuals, Nelson Peery, who has been a major leadership figure in the organizational antecedents of LRNA, was a principal organizer of the Provisional Organizing Committee to Reconstitute a Marxist-Leninist Party (POC) that formed in 1958 with mainly African American and Puerto Rican membership. This organization gradually disintegrated and in 1968, Peery, having been expelled from the POC, went on to be a principal founder of the California Communist League that became the Communist League in 1970. In 1974, the Communist League called for the formation of a Marxist-Leninist party called the Communist Labor Party (CLP) that officially disbanded in 1993. Out of the disbanding of the CLP emerged the National Organizing Committee and then the League of Revolutionaries for a New America in 1995. The move from the CLP to the LRNA is directly related to the core members’ analysis of globalization that I will discuss below.

Structure. LRNA is organized geographically and by work areas. Chapters are the basic organizational unit of LRNA at the level of a city or part of a city. Chapters are organized into Areas that cover a city, metropolitan area or state where there is more than one Chapter. At least once every three years a national convention is held. The National Convention made up of delegates elected from the Areas is the highest decision making body of LRNA and sets national policy of the organization. The National Convention elects a National Committee of no more than 35 people. From its members the National Committee elects a Steering Committee of no more than 14 members and a chairperson who serves as chair of both the National and Steering Committee. Since the National Committee is required to meet only once every 18 months, the Steering Committee stands for the National Committee between its meetings and organizes the National Office that carries out the policies and decisions of the National Convention, and the National and Steering Committees.
Committees and Offices are also organized at the Chapter and Area level. Area Offices are bodies elected by Chapter delegates at Area Conventions. The Area Office organizes for the Chapters to carry out the program, is a resource towards expansion of the organization, and sets up and maintains a division of labor which includes overseeing fundraising, a system of dues collection, press payments, distribution of [the] newspaper, [and] political education. (LRNA, 2001, p. 17)

At the Area and Chapter level committees are organized around specific areas of work (e.g., homelessness, trade unions, etc.) to “guarantee that LRNA decisions within a definite arena of work are carried out effectively” (LRNA, p. 17). Committees at the Area or Chapter level report to the Chapter or Area office from which they were organized. At the local level, Committees “work with the chapters, proposing forums, educational, study circles, etc., to assist their work” (LRNA, p. 13).

LRNA identifies several interrelated organizational principles that run through all the levels of the organization. First, collectivity is a core principle. By this, LRNA (1999) means, “collective decisions and individual responsibility” (p. 4). Collectives must meld the analysis of the world as created by the organization and contained within existing documents put out by LRNA with the actual situation the collective faces in a particular area. “Proceeding from our documents, the members of the collective assess the real world, analyze where the opportunities are for reaching revolutionaries with our propaganda, and make plans for bringing them into the League” (LRNA, p. 4). The collective then assigns tasks for each individual. Individual members are encouraged to take the tasks of the League to the organizations or workplaces within which they already work (i.e., a community organization or trade union). Second, related to collectivity is the principle of political equality. For LRNA, political equality means that everyone is equal before the collective in the sense that each individual is responsible for decision-making and carrying out the tasks of LRNA.

No one is better or higher than anyone else. We each have different experiences and talents to offer…. [T]he collective encourages every person to contribute his/her experience, intellect and creativity. It is people who make history. As the collective understanding increases, the individual flourishes and the revolution marches forward. (LRNA, pp. 4-5)

Third, in terms of decision-making and the relationship between the different levels of the organization, LRNA operates under the principle of “moving as one”. Once collective decisions are made by the whole organization through a National Convention, every organizational body of LRNA is responsible for collectively figuring out how they will carry out those decisions given the concrete realities of their context and their scope of authority and responsibility as determined in the bylaws of the organization. Moreover, the various bodies of the organization do not stand alone. Each body abides by the decisions of higher bodies (LRNA, p. 6) and also regularly reports to the higher bodies. The structure is such because “each body depends on the other for information and experience so that the League can be constantly adjusting its assessments, decisions and policies to conform more closely to the objective situation” (LRNA, p. 6). While the decision-making and reporting between bodies is highly structured to enable the organization as a whole to “move as one”, “the chapter structure is flexible…so [it] can take on the characteristics and idiosyncrasies of the particular territory” (p. 7).

Analysis of globalization. For LRNA (1998) “globalization is capitalism in the age of electronics” (p. 5). They emphasize the fact that social change has two sides (objective and subjective) and revolutions have three interrelated stages (economic, social, and political). The
objective side of social change, corresponding to the economic stage of revolution, is brought on by the introduction of qualitatively new forces of production (microchip). This causes tremendous disruptions in the social relations of a society (the social stage of revolution). A revolution in which the social relations of production and, therefore of society in general, are realigned to the new productive forces can only occur with the culmination of revolution at the level of the political—when a new class takes power. From this analytical framework, LRNA argues that we are well into the economic stage of revolution with microchip-based production, and are now entering an “epoch of social revolution” and the main organization document that outlines their analysis of the current state of capitalism bears this name (Peery, 1993). The massive growth in global financial and speculative capitalism, possible due to the new electronic technology, in the last few decades is merely a reflection of the fact that less and less profit is to be made in productive capital because there is less and less value (profit) creating labor involved in the process. The introduction of the microchip, electronics and robotics (forces of production) into production has in classical Marxist terms placed these forces of production in contradiction with the relations of production thus beginning a period of social revolution (see Marx, 1859/1970). These new productive forces are qualitatively different; they are not merely labor saving devices like machines, they are labor-replacing devices. The microchip allows for the recording of human movement and its repetition without the presence of a human worker. Based on the idea that new instruments of production produce new classes, the inevitable increase in the use of these devices creates a growing sector of the working class that has no hope of ever finding stable work in the capitalist system; they are in effect, outside the capitalist system.

LRNA calls this new sector of the working class, the new class. “The development of this new class is the dialectical opposite of new forms of global capitalist corporations and financiers” (Peery, 2002, pp. 101-102). At the core of this new class are the growing ranks of the homeless and structurally unemployed, with the growing marginally employed sectors of the working class at the periphery. This new class, unlike any other class in history, is an objectively communist class. This means that their survival itself is dependent upon the elimination of capitalist relations of production and distribution; production without labor and, therefore, without wages, demands distribution without payment.

For LRNA, Lenin’s analysis of imperialism and its contradictions was correct. And, while they continue to believe that a Leninist or Marxist-Leninist scientific analysis of society is still relevant, it is in the spirit of this science to recognize that we have now entered a new stage of capitalism, that of globalization or capitalism in the age of electronics.

The old contradictions of imperialism—between socialism and imperialism, between imperialist powers, between imperialist and colony, and between capitalist and worker—linger on but are being overtaken and replaced by new polarities. The main polarity today is between the speculative capitalists and the emerging new class made up of the majority of the world’s population with little or no tie to the capitalist system. (LRNA, 1998, p. 5)

Since we have entered a whole new epoch, a new organization is necessary and it is in this context that we can understand the transition from the CLP as a Marxist-Leninist party to LRNA. “The creation of the League of Revolutionaries for a New America as a non-Marxist organization in no way calls Marxism-Leninism into question. What we do call into question is the Leninist form of organization” (Peery, p. 140). The struggle for communism is no longer a fight to convince the working class that communism would be in its interest. Today, there exists a class or a sector of the working class that absolutely must have communist relations of
production and distribution or they will die. Since, LRNA believes that the objective conditions for communism—the creation of an objectively communist class—are increasingly more evident, the role of revolutionaries is to work on the subjective conditions, or consciousness and ideas.

_**Strategy and Educational work.**_ Like FRSO, LRNA’s strategy is derived from their analysis of capitalism today. As Nelson Peery (2002) states, “strategy…flows from an assessment of the objective factors and capabilities” (p. 136). Unlike FRSO, however, LRNA’s analysis of capitalist globalization takes them in different directions. For LRNA, we are not simply witnessing the continuation of capitalism in its monopoly or imperialist stage with periodic crises of overproduction, but in fact a much more fundamental crisis of capitalism based on the contradiction of new microchip-based forces of production and the relations of production of monopoly capitalism. Stemming from LRNA’s analysis of globalization and the creation of an objective communist class, they see their role in this stage of the revolutionary process as first and foremost educational.

What is needed today is a core of educators who are capable of helping the people understand what they already know. More than that we need speakers who are capable of explaining the situation and the inevitable resolution in such a way as to excite people for their historic revolutionary task. (Peery, 2002, p. 11)

The emphasis on education in LRNA’s strategy includes two basic tasks. First, it is necessary to elevate the subjective formation of the new class. LRNA argues that revolutionaries cannot impact the objective process of revolution. The forces of production are in continuous development regardless of the activity of revolutionaries; this is the inevitable outcome of the process of capitalist production. What revolutionaries can and must do, is to understand the objective process of revolution or the “line of march” (see Marx & Engels, 1848/1948, p. 22), and work side-by-side in an educational way with the objectively revolutionary class in order to raise their consciousness of the resolutions to the problems they face.

Revolutionaries, now, more than ever, must be clear as to what kind of motion we are dealing with. Limited, isolated, reform struggles call for one kind of propaganda. Social motion that reflects revolutionary changes call for another.….If the means of production are undergoing a leap to a new mode of production, then the social response must be characterized as a leap to a new consciousness necessary to form the subjective aspects of the new mode of production. The objective aspects of the leap began with the introduction of something new, automated production. The subjective aspect of the leap, from the spontaneous to the conscious, also begins with the introduction of something new, -- new ideas….As conditions mature, the possibility, the inevitably of these new ideas become clear. (LRNA, 2000a, ¶ 4)

LRNA analyzes the struggle to raise consciousness as one of moving from social awareness to social consciousness. Social awareness means “an awareness that something is wrong and a compassion for the poor but very little sense of class identity. People are increasingly anti-government but not anti-capitalist” (LRNA, 2000b, ¶34). Social consciousness implies and understanding that society is made up of different classes with different economic and political interests (LRNA, 2000a, ¶34). LRNA recognizes that the move from social awareness to social consciousness requires “constant education and…a political party based on a class program” (LRNA, 2000b, ¶38). This is why LRNA believes that the formation of the Labor Party in the US is such an important step for the new class and the working class generally, and an important opportunity for revolutionaries. That the working class in the US
would form the Labor Party shows there is an active element within the working class that understands the need for class-based partisan politics; it is a political response to the social changes brought upon by the impact of the new forces of production. It is also an organizational entity that, beyond being a coalition of working-class issues organizations, can unify the political struggles of the working class around an explicit class identification.

The formation of the Labor Party is an opportunity for the new class that is being formed out of the destruction of all sections of society to separate itself from the political parties, programs, and spokespersons of the enemy class. The Labor Party….provides an organizational mechanism to advance people from what comes naturally -- their scattered, narrow, defensive reaction to problems -- and develop them into a politically cohesive force, united around common demands and perspective. [T]he Labor Party must become "the (political) organizational vehicle for the class" to move from the stage of social awareness to the stage of social consciousness" or class identity and political independence. LRNA, 2000b, ¶20-21)

With the organizational vehicle of the Labor Party, LRNA believes that its educational work with the new class must be based from within the mass movements of the class itself. “This education cannot consist of simply handing out leaflets or passing out papers or holding forums. We must be involved in the practical struggle, in such a way that we constantly are teaching on that basis” (Peery, 2002, p. 138). This educational work has two aspects to it: agitation and propaganda. Agitation is the educational effort to raise the problems of capitalism and the irreconcilable nature of specific issues facing the new class under capitalism. Propaganda is “the intellectual effort to win people to the understanding that their struggle is the struggle for communism” (LRNA, 1999, p. 34).

Agitation develops on the basis of the practical movement, on the actual activity of the masses of the people. We must approach them in their actual situation. On that basis we must find the way to raise the question of the property relations and capitalism. The other part and not apart from it but absolutely connected with it, is the propagandistic question about what is possible to build. (Peery, p. 139)

Beyond and fundamentally related to the work with the new class, LRNA’s second basic task at this stage of the revolutionary process is to “go to all sections of society and gather together the revolutionaries and propagate a general understanding of the communist resolution of the problems that society is fighting out” (LRNA, 2001, p. 11). Throughout all of LRNA’s analysis is the notion of constant motion and change; this is no exception with the concept of what constitutes a revolutionary. In the current period, LRNA says that revolutionaries are “those who have already accepted the necessity of revolution and who are striving to politically educate others based on some vision of a new society” (LRNA, 1999, p. 34). The introduction of new technology is creating an objective communist class (the new class), while at the same time creating such social disruption that people from broad sectors of society are beginning to see that fundamental transformations are necessary to resolve society’s problems. This fact, merely, confirms for LRNA that we are in the throngs of the economic stage of revolution and entering an epoch of social revolution that deeply disrupts all sectors and institutions of society.

At this moment we are focusing on trying to reach, influence, and recruit people, who are already trying to propagate new ideas….Our immediate goal is to create an organization of propagandists. They can be found in most every walk of life….Recruiting or influencing one such person can give us access to an audience of thousands. In summary, we are facing the imminent threat of economic collapse and fascism. We have a small
window of opportunity to build an organization that will survive the first blows of the
enemy and that can change history. We must give the propagandists the ammunition they
need to expose the immorality of the present system and inspire the people with a vision
of a world of plenty. (LRNA, 1999, pp. 34-35)

We can analyze the specific educational activities of LRNA by dividing its educational work into
what it calls education and propaganda. For, LRNA, however, it should be pointed out that these
two types of activity are intimately related. In adult education literature on social movements,
these forms have been identified with the idea of internal (education) and external (propaganda)
education (Crowther & Shaw, 1997; Dykstra & Law, 1994; Kastner, 1990; Martin, 1988;

Propaganda (or external education) work in the mass movements is the major function of LRNA
in the subjective formation of the new class.

We need to build an infrastructure of study circles and forums, to participate in radio and
television shows, to produce videos and cassette tapes. Everyone in the League must
write for and distribute the press. Making the press the center of our work will proceed
along with and as part of transforming the League into an organization of propagandists.
(LRNA, 1998, pp. 19-20)

The League produces the monthly newspaper People’s Tribune/Tribuno del Pueblo, the monthly
radio broadcasts of People’s Tribune Radio that it distributes to radio stations willing to air them
and also has them available on their website, CDs and cassette tapes, and has a Speakers Bureau
(Speakers for a New America) of people willing to travel and speak on specific topics. Within
all of these instruments and methods of propaganda, the League emphasizes its analysis of
capitalism in the age of electronics and the needs of the new class.

We can use the term education to refer to the intellectual and skill capacity development
of its members. There are specific forms of education within LRNA such as League schools and
regular study sessions as a part of regular meetings that develop members understanding of the
organization’s positions and the members’ ability to critically assess the socio-political context at
the local and national level.

League education is designed to educate propagandists. Our core curriculum focuses on
the Program and the cause of communism: What the League is and what we are
attempting to do….Through this process, we incorporate the methodology of
understanding how things change and how we are going to affect the change. We teach
that there is a science to everything and that there is a science of society as well. Local
education is what will transform the League and stabilize it. Education is most effective
when it answers the questions people are actually asking. Teaching so people can learn
means starting from their perceptions. League members in the chapters and Area Offices
are in the best position to know those questions and perceptions. Every member should
receive, within the area, an orientation in the convention documents and classes covering
key political and theoretical concepts. The chapters and areas hold study circles and
forums and classes, and adjust curriculums [sic] to fit the local needs. (LRNA, 1999, p.
37)

There are also examples of informal forms of education. All levels of the organization
must file activity reports and analytical reports of the socio-political situation in their area; the
preparation work for and the writing of these reports is a form of education. Moreover, there is
an effort to develop these reports collectively to include the widest possible number of members
in this process. Members are also encouraged to seek outside training to develop skills related to
specific tasks within the organization. Education and propaganda are related in that some educational work is directed at in-depth study of a particular current issue from which reports and newspaper articles (propaganda) may be generated; such was the case with the Enron scandal. Moreover, the newspaper plays the dual role of being a tool of propaganda in the mass movements and as the basis for study and discussion at the Chapter and Local level.

Conclusion

The destruction caused by globalization reflected in the most localized situations is not a problem of a dialectic between the local and the global, but the results of the internal contradictions of capitalism. With all the talk of globalization, it is often too easy to lose sight of the fact that we are talking about the expansion of capitalist relations. We are living in a historical period in which we must confront head-on the realities that capitalism is quickly destroying life on the planet. As educators we are beginning to educate ourselves and those we work with on the political economic realities of the 500 year-old economic system under which most people on the planet live. Referenced in the adult educator literature to greater or lesser degrees are some of the most widely read treatises on globalization and even articles from journals of left or socialist thought such as *Monthly Review*. Yet, missing from this effort is a whole area of the radical or revolutionary tradition of theory-building and educational work within the long history of revolutionary organizations. Educators clamor for practical ideas often refusing theory seemingly divorced from educational practice, while ignoring theories of globalization that emerge from organizations whose theories directly inform and emerge from their political and educational practice.

The organizations I am studying are rich sources of economic and socio-political analysis. I began the literature review at the start of this paper by arguing that perspectives of the globalization process affect people’s understanding of the prospect for social change, how this change should take place, and who are most likely to be the agents of this change, and we can see that with FRSO and LRNA. More importantly we can see how this results in their offering analyses and organizational forms distinct from those who champion civil societarianism that should be taken seriously by radical adult education. FRSO has maintained a Marxist-Leninist analysis of imperialism that is a compelling description and critique of the economic realities facing the world. It is hard to argue that what we seem to be witnessing on a global scale today is nothing more than the great imperialist blocks squabbling over the division of the world in their interests. FRSO organizes around this analysis, while basing it in the specific realities of the history of white supremacy in the United States. Seeing the continuation of the primary contradiction between the peoples of the world and imperialism, they prioritize a united front against imperialism and look to the Third World as the primary place today for major defeats of imperialist globalization, while organizing in the United States for a strategic alliance between the multinational working class and the oppressed nationalities. LRNA’s very essence is a result of over ten years of rethinking and analyzing the nature of capitalism in the age of electronics (globalization). For LRNA we have entered a qualitatively new stage of capitalism or more precisely an epoch of social revolution. The multifaceted social degeneration we are witnessing today is a direct result of the introduction of a quantity of a new quality (electronics) into the contradiction between the forces and relations of production, resulting in the conversion of this contradiction into an antagonism that inevitably leads to the destruction of the relation. The social reconstruction that follows for LRNA, is not equally an inevitable process but one subject
to political intervention. In other words, the reconstruction of our society will depend upon the conscious (educated) intervention of the primary social forces increasingly evident today (the new class and the financial capitalists). There is no guarantee; one of these forces will take the lead in reorganizing society in its interests, therefore, LRNA believes this is not the stage for an ideologically-based Marxist organization but for an organization of revolutionaries whose primary purpose is to raise the consciousness of all sectors of society and especially that of the new class to the historic nature of the situation today.

Through their (internal) educational work both these organizations produce organic intellectuals of the working class. Through the decades of left retreat in the 1980s and 1990s they maintained allegiance to the necessity and possibilities of revolutionary transformation and continue to engage in external education (propaganda) aimed at raising people’s consciousness of this task. The sub field of radical adult education will continue to languish in the social democratic dead end of civil societarianism until it begins to take seriously radical or revolutionary political parties and organizations of the type within which Gramsci and other “radical heroes” of adult education worked.

References


