

An Excerpt From The Question And Answer Period

January 1, 1980

Audience Member: I thought it was an interesting speech. Before I ask my question, let me comment that I found it really good to get a brief outline of Alive's history set in the context of the development of the situation in Canada over the past ten years. It's good to see how Alive fits into that. Definitely the two things are connected. A group like Alive can't develop independent of what's going on in the broad society. I thought that whole trend in the speech was good. I also thought the look at Alive's work over the last year and a half was good. It was put into perspective well. All that makes any projections more understandable.

I prefaced my remarks this way because my question is in the form of a criticism. *(Laughter)*

APC Representative: We don't listen to criticisms. *(Laughter)*

Audience Member: One thing I learned from Alive is the way to make a negative point is to cover your ass first. *(Laughter)*

I think it comes down to a question of organizing. You quite clearly stated that Alive hasn't failed to organize more people. It just hasn't tried to organize more people. You were making that distinction. In doing so you overlooked something. Isn't it better to try and fail than not to try. If I was one of these constant critics I'd say, "Well, in the last eight and a half years we've fallen on our faces three or four times but we've picked ourselves up and kept going. You guys haven't even tried." I know you probably recognize that they'll say that but why is it you've never tried? You'll have to go into that in more detail if this is what Alive wants to do now. Why has Alive been around for eight and a half years and it has never made a serious attempt to organize?

APC Representative: In terms of saying we haven't made the attempt, we don't put it forward as a badge of pride. We just say it because it's true. We get into trouble with these critics just for saying what's true.

We don't stand up and say, "We never made the attempt and that is absolutely correct." We just go as far as saying, "We never made the attempt." If you ask us for our political opinion of that true statement of ours, we'll agree with your assessment: we are wrong not to have tried thus far, we should have tried. However, we can't say because we should have, we did. We didn't and we didn't.

Our statement is a bit of a mischaracterization in that there have been some attempts. There are some models established by us in the organizing realm. We have made contact with people and moved them forward. Our organization has grown over the years.

We're talking about large scale organizing — an actual upsurge. We're talking about hundreds of contacts, friends and supporters. If we're talking about tens of members, tens of supporters, tens of friends, it is a bit of a mischaracterization. We have organized individuals here and individuals there but never have there been significant numbers worked with by us on a protracted basis. They say Joe Hill used to sign up four hundred a day. We don't expect to do that.

Another aspect of the slight mischaracterization is that individuals in the organization have tried to organize. Where it hasn't been the organization's policy, they've just gone beyond the organization's perimeters and made the attempt. That has given us some good experience to draw on. It was never the organization's policy not to organize, even under the misleadership we eventually overthrew. It's just that the practice wasn't to organize.

All that doesn't mean much in terms of what you're saying. Yeah, it would've been better to try. Why didn't we try? A couple of reasons. We were lazy. This is the kind of laziness we publicly identified and did self-criticism for in Alive 125. It wasn't a laziness that meant we didn't do hard work every day. It didn't mean we slept in every day.

It was a laziness about analyzing matters to the depth that goes beyond appearance to essence. This is the error we made which

caused us to suffer under this misleadership for such a long time. We should have overthrown that misleadership earlier too. Since we produced Alive 125, a number of friends and supporters have asked, "Why didn't we do it earlier?" We ask ourselves the same question. It's a hard question to put to ourselves. It's easy to look back and see we would be a lot further ahead if we'd done it two years earlier. We'd be a lot further ahead if we'd done it four years earlier.

The material fact is we didn't. We don't wear that as a badge of pride either. We don't say, "We didn't and that was absolutely correct." We say just the opposite. The correct thing would have been to overthrow this misleadership earlier.

By the same token, the correct thing would have been to have organizing as our group's active policy in practice earlier. This laziness in applying analytical faculties was more insidious than it might seem at first glance. For a period of time, our organization had the self-definition that it did educational work. It saw itself as only making a contribution to anti-imperialist revolution, not to be a vanguard in the anti-imperialist revolution but just to make a contribution on the educational front. Some years ago, certainly long before this misleadership was overthrown, the organization actually added a second tenet to its self-description, that made the purpose: to educate and to organize.

The laziness of our members, then, in terms of applying analytical faculties to fulfil the purpose of the organization was quite profound. It was stated that one of two functions of the organization was to organize but people still didn't organize.

There were specific reasons that people didn't organize. Aside from that general tenet stating organizing should be done, there were no active programs that allowed members to organize. There were no guidelines for members on how to organize. There was no education for members on how to be organizers. There were no formalized principles of the organization in a form that could be read. A constitution of the organization, a basis of unity, these are crucial tools for an organizer. These things just didn't exist in a form members could show to supporters. We intend to rectify those oversights.

Of course, the only reason to rectify errors is because they are there. The fact that they have to be rectified shows they are there. Inherent in the pronouncement that we will formalize many things not previously formalized is the admission that organizers had to get by without these before.

Just as we had to rectify the error of following misleadership for so long, we have to rectify the error of not pursuing organizing work firmly. In that, we have to rectify the error of not giving organizers proper tools.

Not for you but for these other critics, it's often the case that they pick up on and criticize us for what we tell them about ourselves without giving congratulations that we are able to tell them. So they criticize us for languishing under this misleadership but they never give even offhand congratulations for overthrowing the misleadership. Of course, our analysis of some of these critics' groups is that they have languished under misleadership for equally long but haven't overthrown it. *(Laughter)* They continue to languish despite reading Alive 125.

The difficulty with criticism like yours is that we don't want to say we don't recognize we should have been organizing sooner — we should have been — but we don't want to cry over spilled milk either. It's anti-materialist to say, "Let's go back to 1975 to make our start on organizing." That's idealistic. We say we should have started in 1975 but we didn't so we'll start in 1980.

One of the facts that really bothers us is that some of these attempts that were made, some of the small models were actually consciously squashed by this misleadership. They could have turned into reasons for our organization to set these policies earlier, to set this direction earlier.