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# THE DEVELOPMENT MODEL OF ORGANIZING

## I. Introduction:

We are on the edge of a very volatile moment in American society when there is enormous potential for the growth of mass movements and fundamental changes in society. The character of these mass movements can range from reactionary, right wing, progressive, or left--that depends on us. The current level of progressive organization and the pool of leadership is extraordinarily weak--reflecting the grinding influence of a couple of decades of conservatism, fear, bribery, fragmentation, attack, and ideological drift on a remarkably large pool of dynamic leaders and organizations in place at the end of the 1960s.

We need to deliberately re-build a pool of leaders and organizations that can contend for leadership and influence in these dangerous and maybe promising times. This paper is written to contribute to this effort by encouraging reflection and debate on the issue of leadership in the mass movement and the building of strong organizations. We focus on "the organizer." There are several important assumptions behind this focus:

1. This paper describes organizing in the context of and in pursuit of a strategic vision that seeks greater popular control over the economy and broad democracy.

2. An "organizer" isn't inherently linked to progressive politics--to state the obvious. Every ideology and strategic analysis has its organizers. And within every strategic effort, there are good and bad organizers.

3. We want to develop organizers that are professional and highly trained.

4. For the purpose of this paper, we define organizers as leaders, not just facilitators or educators. Facilitation and education are critical skills of an organizer, but for our purpose, our focus is on effective leadership around a strategic vision that seeks to effectively compete and prevail over other strategic visions of society.

## II. CLCR's Organizing Tradition and the evolution of our vision

For organizing to succeed, it has to be in pursuit of a positive option in the short and long term. People don't organize just because they are oppressed or exploited-- they organize for something, they organize because they have higher expectations that seem achievable. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, some veteran community and labor organizers began to recognize that objectives that had been adequate for aggressive social change organizing in the 1960s, no longer were adequate. The socialist and/or social democratic vision that fueled huge movements for change in the 1930s and 1940s, and again in the 1960s and 1970s had been generally discredited in the public eye --a result of its internal weaknesses that have yet to be adequately addressed by the left[1], as well as the virulent and unrelenting physical and philosophical attack waged by its opponents. CLCR emerged from discussions among local organizers sensing the need for a much deeper analysis and more comprehensive options as the focus of organizing if we were to be able to organize our constituencies-- at that time, unionized workers. [2]

CLCR, like other networks of organizers from the 1960s, applied and developed our intellectual, strategic, and technical skills typically within the context of a particular community, a particular issue, or a particular constituency. Our setting was the labor and industrial retention movement in poor, urban communities. Other organizers of this political generation went into community organizing, housing, community development, the women=s movement, the environmental movement, or local government. The collective experience of this generation contributed to reconstructing a paradigm for management and development of the economy and standards for our own organizational and professional life that are consistent with our social and political values. This vision has the potential to spark a genuinely mass movement that could contend for power in the current political, social and economic environment. Winning political power locally and nationally will give us the opportunity to test and refine the model and our skills and prove its potential, or expose its hidden fundamental flaws.

The effort to have an adequate analysis and positive option has taken much longer than we would have predicted. Over the last 5-6 years, we, in common work with other organizations and leaders in the industrial retention and community development movement have worked to construct a strategic analysis of our economy and a positive alternative paradigm for economic development simply characterized as the "high road@" in contrast to the "low road." Essentially, we:

1. Seek popular control and management of the economy from the micro to the macro level--from the workplace to the international arena--through an alliance of labor, community, and local business;

2. Exhaust the strengths of the market to expose and substitute for its weaknesses by action and intervention by government or other organized public institutions;

3. Premise our economics and politics on solidarity, democracy, and sustainability.

4. Build organizations that "walk our talk" and are consistent with our vision of a new society, committed to building the individual and the organization as we build the broader movement.

Now the requirement of our continued work is to hone and dramatically expand the use of our organizing, management, educational and training, and organizational development skills. We have to dramatically transform the actual number of people, leaders, and organizations who are gathered around and seeking to apply this new paradigm, from scores and hundreds to thousands and millions.

This is the context for examining and reviving our serious attention to our approach to organizing. CLCR's focus for the last 14 years has been investigating and experimenting with various approaches to creating a contemporary strategic analysis and tactical framework and exploring such issues as worker ownership, acquisitions, the various components of community development--trying to find out if these issues were dead ends or part of an emerging and useful strategy for labor and community. Organizing is central to our strategic analysis. The organizing tradition we represent was, in fact, the foundation for our strategic analysis.[3] Even though "organizing" has always been recognized as a critical component of our work, we have spent very little time defining exactly what it was, what we expected to achieve, the qualifications and requirements of staff, etc. Or when we did spend time on this issue, the work remained incomplete.

Taking up the details of applying and organizing for this alternative vision, including our views on "organizing" now becomes an important task. The purpose of this paper is to stimulate that discussion as a basis for clearly defining our approach to organizing and its implications for staffing, training, and evaluation.


## III.  Our Approach to Organizing around our Strategic Analysis:

Our model is the Development Model of Organizing. Through organizing, we bring forward the intelligence, ownership, enthusiasm, militancy, and creativity of average people in building organizations and institutions, in campaigns of all kinds, and in all aspects of economic development. Organizing is:

1. Our tool for leaders to bring in wider and wider circles of people to own and support a particular component of work.

2. The activity which is the entry point of a person into our strategic vision.

3. Transforming activity for the individual and organization.

4. And requires active and effective education, debate, and critical reflection at all stages of development.

Our basic approach is based on the recognition that **any** group of people--large or small--has three basic categories--leaders, supporters, and opponents. The leaders are those who have obvious leadership characteristics and committed to projects that include but expand beyond their own self-interest. They will take personal risks in support of such a program. They are, by definition, a small segment of the broader group--typically less than 5%. The supporters are those who will follow leaders and a program that are in their broader interest and inclusive of other interests. This is typically 80-90% of the group. The opponents are strictly self-interested and will act against any program that doesn't privilege their immediate self-interest. This is typically a very small part of the group representing 5% or less of the whole.

Our first job is to identify who are leaders in the group that we seek to organize. They are our keys to the rest of the group, community, or constituency. They may already be recognized through their participation in an organization or a leadership circle. On the other hand, they may not be formally recognized or even aware of their own leadership qualities and potential. There is no way to adequately identify them except by seeing them in the context of activity and interaction. We must acknowledge from the beginning the obvious blinders of our society connected with race, gender, class, formal education, and personality type and then peel those blinders off as we begin our search for the natural leaders in a group.

Once we have identified the leaders, our job is to win them over to our program and **rely on them** in winning over the supporters and isolating, transforming, and/or defeating the opponents. The leaders are those that enjoy the respect of the supporters. They have the contacts and knowledge that can translate new and complicated ideas to the broader community and secure confidence and support, recruit new leaders, and criticize or isolate someone in the community who is backward for whatever reason, and playing a destructive role.

Once we have a small group of leaders, our job is to train them in the skills essential for the work. This includes a relatively deep understanding of our strategic analysis, basic organizational skills, the key strategic components of the immediate project, etc. The training can be done in traditional training sessions but must always

be linked to doing the work of the project.   The link between the ideas and the work, between our theory and practice must always be strengthened by regular reflection and summary of experience that identifies and relies on our strengths to identify and overcome our weaknesses.

This group--our organizers and the leaders of the constituency we are seeking to organize--constitute the leadership "core."  We are constantly working to improve our relationship with this core, to increase its collective sophistication and capacity, and to increase its size.  It is this core which serves as the collective leadership in moving the masses of the constituency in the campaign, election, organizational drive, etc.  This core inevitably changes in composition, with some people leaving it because of lack of capacity or interest and new members being recruited.  It may be an informal leadership network, or a formally recognized leadership body depending on the circumstances.  What it does at any particular moment is a tactical question and dependent on the objectives and circumstance.

Our benchmarks for evaluating the sophistication of our constituency or the leaders are relative to the community. Our standard should be to integrate with them at their level, and raise their level to a higher degree of understanding of our program.  This sounds awfully simplistic, but the impatience and self-righteousness of even the most dedicated organizer has frequently led to failure.  This impatience sometimes reflect the luxuries of earlier times when conditions were not so harsh and organizers could expect a more "organizer-friendly" environment.  You could depend on working in a community of people that had typically had positive experience in the context of a family, a church, a union, a workplace, the military, or a civic organization.  Today, organizers must find ways to do effective work among people who may be a long way from where they need to be.  This skill is usually a given for an organizer who has emerged from the ranks, but has to be deliberately valued and learned by an organizer who is going into a new community to organize.

Patience combined with dedication and high standards of performance are the key requirements of our organizers, particularly those who come from outside the immediate community of those they are seeking to organize.  During the Vietnam struggle for independence, Vietnamese organizers who went into very primitive villages adopted even painful village cultures that included grinding ones teeth into sharp points, so they would not be seen as separate or disdainful of the people they were organizing.  Members of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee--the vanguard of the '60s Civil Rights Movement were notorious for committing to spending a year or two to live with and get to know the people of a southern community they were trying to organize.  Hundreds of organizers went into factories during the 1960s and 1970s to organize workers and are now part of the new generation of leaders in our major unions.  They got to know their fellow-workers on their terms, were successful in organizing their shops, and rose to leadership positions in the union.  This often took 3-4 years of

careful, low profile activity. They didn't wear their political slogans on their sleeves, or impatiently advance their radical personal views but got to know the values, ideas, and language of the people they worked with. Their efforts at integration with the people they were organizing weren=t designed to fool anyone on whom they were or their activist origins, but it showed the depth of respect they had for the people they were trying to lead.

The "Development Model of Organizing" is significant for several reasons.

1. It defines the obligation of the organizer to identify and successfully link with the leaders of those we are trying to organize rather than attributing success or capacity to the hard work or commitment or heroism of the organizer. The next step is to provide training and education for these new organizers, giving them the essential tools for organizational power. This linkage develops the individual.

2. It identifies the fundamental linkage between our ideas, our agenda, and our organizing as opposed to reducing organizing to just a special skill. This open linkage permits accountability. This linkage develops the ideas and program of the organization.

3. Through this approach, we test our ideas through disciplined application, reflection, and evaluation. In the course of this learning cycle we inevitably refine our ideas, identify those ideas that are simply wrong, and can then change or adjust our ideas. This style organizing represents strong leadership as well as active democratic consultation with those we seek to move in a direction. This develops the organization.

4. We consciously and deliberately develop the knowledge, capacity, and resources of the individuals and the organizations involved in this process.

This approach to organizing is not just reserved for work with poor people or workers. We organize with this style in all of our constituencies including labor and community, but also in philanthropic circles, among educators, policy networks and organizations, union officials, the development community, etc. With our new paradigm, we do seek the active support and application of our strategic vision in every sector we work with. In each sector, the terms, tactics, and objectives are different for winning the leadership and moving the sector forward. Each sector requires different skills and resources on the part of the organizer. "Organizing" is not just a term reserved for working with the most oppressed as some romantics would like to suggest.

**IV. The qualities of our organizers:**

    **A. Characteristics:**

We need organizers that are:

1.  Recruited from the leaders of the constituencies we are seeking to organize;

2.  Or people who are skilled at and committed to integrating with the section of people we are organizing as the fundamental first step in identifying and recruiting the leaders from that group.

Both categories of organizers need to be able to:

a.  Quickly learn the details of our strategic analysis and can translate its relevance and linkage in the context of a range of seemingly unrelated issues. They know the subtleties, the arguments and the counter-arguments that emerge in seeking support for our point of view, our vision, and our program.

b.  Be outgoing and friendly; able to effectively interview people and determine their interests, questions, concerns, and skills; able to engage people on their differences with our perspectives and win them over through argument and friendly persuasion; genuinely interested in getting to know people through social and personal interaction; etc.;

c.  Overcome issues of race, gender, and class distinction in organizing and leadership situations;

d.  Be personally organized and efficient; consistent and effective with follow-through; knowledgeable and skilled on organizational issues; able to work independently without close supervision yet able and willing to be accountable to a constituency as well as our organization.

### B. Compensation and Working Conditions:

We need to provide fair and, when possible, generous compensation and benefits to our organizers to enable them to truly develop as professionals through all aspects of their life, including those challenges of mature life that can include raising a family, sickness and difficulties, and retirement. They need to have adequate vacation time to recharge and refocus. They need exposure to training and educational opportunities that help them develop their particular skills as well as a broad educational foundation.
One of the remnants of organizing traditions born of middle-class and priveleged young people who plunged into mass social movements, was a romanticization of poverty or the harsh conditions that often went with organizing in poor and working class communities. Rather than simply recognized as a condition that should be tolerated

when necessary and overcome when possible, it was elevated to a principle. Today their organizations or networks, as a matter of principle, pay minimum wages and benefits and demand a work style that generally precludes the ability to sustain a career In organizing or to meet the complex requirements of raising a family, sustaining long-term relationships, or being prepared for old age. These requirements are tolerable for young organizers who have "golden parachutes" because of the family or class background but are one of the barriers to recruiting people who come from poor backgrounds or the communities of color and particular oppression that we see as the key component of a successful struggle for social change. These requirements generally guarantee a high turnover rate of organizers and uniform age, class, and racial characteristics in organizations and movements that deliberately oppose the development model of organizing as it applies to their own staff.

**V. Contrary Approaches to the Development Model of Organizing:** There are a number of organizing traditions that are contrary to our approach that have been held by our various partners in the community, political, and labor movement that are important to understand and critique as we define our style and approach. Each of these styles has particular strengths as well as weaknesses, making any effort to analyze difficult, but important.

> **1. Organizing is a technical skill apart from your "agenda."** All organizing strategies finally reflect the political and economic analysis of those who wield the organizing tool.[4] In the same way, our organizing style uniquely reflects our political and economic analysis. It is the essential tool we have to educate, mobilize, and involve people in our economic and political strategy. It is just this capacity that gives us a competitive advantage in our economic and political work. It can't be reserved as a component that fits in at an early or later stage of our development strategy. Organizing has to be continuously linked to our economic work. Our economic development leaders need to understand the organizing character of our work. Our organizers need to fully understand our organizational and economic development strategies.

> **2. "Let the People Decide" Approach:** There are organizations and leaders whose mission or job is to represent the views of a community, like elected officials. The model advanced in this paper distinguishes between those with a formal obligation to "represent" the community, and activist leaders and organizations that avoid accountability by falsely hiding behind an illusion of neutrality, when their mission is to organize around an agenda. They either intentionally or unintentionally don't acknowledge their agenda. They often claim that organizing around an agenda as anti-democratic, manipulative, and "imposing" our views on the people. In every case I know, the organizer has always had an agenda. Often they use the notion of "neutrality" to disguise or

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deny their agenda, not wanting to disclose it fully or to be held accountable for it. Our approach is to candidly organize around our economic and political analysis and explaining our views rather than denying them. We have a full agenda that we encourage those we organize to fully understand, as well as support, criticize, or challenge. This then allows a much higher level of consultation and accountability. We either succeed or don't succeed, and success or failure depends on the ideas and/or the skill of the organizers.

Failure of our organizing work is the basis to reflect on, and then perhaps adjust or change our agenda. This completes the cycle of how our ideas and strategies develop in the first place: We have an idea, we test it in practice, we evaluate the practice, and then we refine the idea, test it in practice, and the cycle continues forever.

**3. The Reductionist Approach--reducing the lowest common denominator to anger, victimization, opposition:** This style is typical of those who organize not to bring about fundamental change, but to mobilize a constituency for a certain, short-term effect, and to be the power broker for those they organize. Organizing is not a springboard for understanding a more sophisticated analysis but a method to mobilize that appeals to the lowest common denominator of the group. It gives power or a mandate to the "power broker." Typically ideas, discussions, and critical reflection are ignored and/or counter-posed to action and results rather than seeing the necessary linkage between these different components of organizing. Internal democracy and promoting leadership from the constituency are often lacking in this model. This is a common tradition in community and labor organizing and perpetuates a paternal relationship between the organizer and constituency. We seek to organize anger and frustration, but use this as a springboard to understand a broader, fuller analysis and program.

**4. The Service model:** This is the organizer who organizes only around servicing the constituency, or getting them something that is narrowly in their self interest whether it=s a job, or better wages, or the type of education and training they need for their job, and not raising its expectations and understanding of the source of their problems or advancing a program for real change.

**5. The Top-Down Campaign Model:** We are absolutely in favor of organizing campaigns--mass, electoral, union drives, etc. Any good idea has to be regularly proven by numbers--by turning out those who support the fight in a way that proves the validity and growth of the movement. But we are concerned about the organizer that fails to see the campaign in the context of the long term overall development of people and organizations and reduces them only to numbers of picketers or numbers of votes, turnout at a meeting, those signed up in a canvass, etc. This is the "left" variant of the service model and very familiar to

us. We haven't been critical of this style because of the appeal of its militancy, and value of a willingness to fight in these times. But the negative impact of this model can be as great as other bad styles. The organizer comes in with skill, sophistication, and militancy and mobilizes a campaign around an election, a plant closing, a low-road company, or some other source of public abuse. The campaign becomes an end in itself and victory is defined as this one particular battle rather than the war. There is a failure to provide effective education to grass roots leadership and its membership in the course of the campaign. Commands by the experts are given. Good speeches rally the troops. Leaflets and newsletters and public relations flood the community or workplace. A constituency is built for the battle and as a threat to be used in negotiations. Once the campaign or battle is over, win or lose, the campaigners move on. There is no education or organization building following the battle, much less during the battle. The grass roots organizers and leaders are left to pick up the pieces, and if vulnerable, are left to attack. This style characterized some of the efforts by some prominent civil rights leaders during the 1960s. They would come into a community like Selma, following years of patient work by local organizers. They would organize a massive demonstration, attract media, attract repression, and then leave after the march. Six months later, repression would hit. Leaders would be killed or harassed. Organization remained fragile -- overtaxed by the campaign rather than strengthened by the attention.

**6. The Deal:** Another variation of the command approach is around specific development projects such as an employee-buy out or development project. Rather than the militant campaign, the battle is the "deal." The idea is initially raised and support is secured from the workers. Then the opportunity starts to emerge as a real possibility if only the seller can be convinced, financing raised, etc. Then all the attention is on those financial and technical details. Worker education and organization are pushed to the background, waiting for a more opportune time once the deal is done. Then the deal is done, and the leadership team is buried in details of production, etc. The workers are now in a completely new power situation, without the organization or the understanding they need to really defend themselves and to insure that the new company proceeds with decisions based on their values.

## VI. Conclusion:

We need to consolidate our movement on our "Development Model of Organizing." There is a rich tradition and commitment to organizing that needs to be adjusted to the times as a prerequisite to building a massive movement for change. This paper seeks to stimulate critical thinking and debate on the Development Model as well as the other traditions it treats critically, assuming that all serious organizers, from various traditions, now are eager for critical debate and reflection in the context of a

social, political, and economic situation that is pregnant with change.

I welcome your ideas, criticisms, and suggestions.

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**End Notes:**

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1. I think the fundamental mistakes were two:

    A. The equation of markets with capitalism leading to a failure to utilize the strengths and positive features of market forces as the mechanism to define government policy.

    B. The failure to fully develop the democratic aspect of the mass movement, the state, society, and the economy.

2. The need for something like CLCR emerged from a meeting of labor leaders, organizers and activists at a conference at the Hammond, Ind. Holiday Inn in 1981. A group of organizers in steel, grappling with the challenges and pitfalls of concession bargaining in Basic Steel and anticipating more plant closures, complicated bargaining, and a growing inability to secure support from the rank and file, suggested the need for developing a much deeper analysis of the industry on a regular basis that could be distributed to leaders and organizers. Leaders from the Rank and File Caucus of USWA District 31 began to brainstorm on what such a center and service could look like. These discussions led to the formation of CLCR in the spring of 1982 and its incorporation in June, 1982. The first decision was to broaden the focus beyond the internal politics of the USWA and to avoid becoming some type of left-wing think-tank. The general purpose of CLCR was to:

    A. Provide detailed research and analysis of particular companies and communities for grassroots labor and community organizations to serve as a foundation for new approaches to organizing.

    B. To define Alabor@ as those who work, including the organized and unorganized, to avoid a narrow identification with only organized labor.

    C. To build and promote labor and community coalitions that linked with all sectors and strata in working-class communities including local businesses and the development community.

    D. Raise critical thinking by positive models as an effort to break with the cycle of destructive accusations that often blocked discussion and the development of broader unity.

3. This tradition can be summarized as the left tradition of the 1960s that was created in the democratic and anti-imperialist movements of that time and informed by previous

generations of democratic and left movements. This tradition typically focused on democratic control of institutions; grass roots mobilization; militancy; and central themes of race, gender, and class. This could be a useful discussion that would seek to define the main critical currents that emerged from the left that shape our thinking. It could constitute a separate paper.

4. "Organizing" is not synonymous with progressive or social change politics as some assume. The Democratic Party in Chicago had a very sophisticated grass roots organizing effort to preserve established power relations. The Alinsky organizing tradition accepts the principles of capitalist society, and set up an organizing approach that could democratize and expand the redistribution of wealth to particular communities that organized in their self-interest, and typically had been excluded from traditional power relations. The Alinsky model borrowed extensively from the John L. Lewis organizing model of the CIO that also accepted the traditional capitalist order and current gender and race power relations, yet sought more equitable redistribution of wealth and justice to workers and unions within the orderly rules of the game prescribed by the Wagner Act. There are other organizing models that also reflect an energetic approach to organizing people that accepts the basic premises of our society, accepts the leadership of the Democratic Party, and has a liberal approach to economic development.

Our organizing model reflects the objectives and approach to creating a new economic and political paradigm that depends on dramatically changing power relations in the economy and in politics.