ONE STEP FORWARD
TWO STEPS BACK

mutual aid, “mass work” and communist strategy
INTRODUCTION: ON THE MAOIST COMMUNIST PARTY

"Mass work is done within the class struggle and not on its margins." - General Political Line of the Communist Party of Peru

In the months leading up to the eruption of the COVID-19 crisis, the central task of the Maoist Communist Party – OC had been to carry out mass work according to the slogan, "serve the people!" The main strategic orientation of this work should have been to build towards the formation of a Maoist communist party capable of serving as proletarian leadership of the mass movement, steering the struggle in a direction that brings us ever closer to a revolutionary break. Accomplishing this task first requires inserting our activists into the masses' struggles, in order to qualitatively raise the level of class struggle and forge mass links through leading the masses in combat with the class enemy.

Lack of clarity about this orientation and the struggle to develop a strategic line on the question of party construction ultimately lead to the dismantling of the central structure of the MCP-OC at its 2020 congress. The disorganization we discovered over the course of that struggle was reflected in the formalistic centralization which defined the last year of our national work. While some of these errors can be traced to the eclectic or petit-bourgeois "Mao-ish" politics of many sectors of the former MCP-OC (ourselves included), others can only be attributed to a premature attempt to construct a national organization on the basis of a false unity around a style of work whose supposed strategic value was taken for granted.¹

While the old national structure of the Maoist Communist Party - OC is gone, the struggle to construct a Maoist Communist Party lives on in the work of our newly autonomous local organizations. It is crucial for the success of that work that we remain clearheaded regarding the stage of struggle which we now face, in which all legitimately antirevisionist formations share the same daunting task: to articulate a proletarian class line as the practical application of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism (understood as scientific methodology rather than a series of dictums and buzzwords) to the concrete situation in the so-called u.s.a, and to unite communist militants and the broad masses around that line through the concentric construction of the three instruments of the revolution.

As we enter into a new period of struggle, it is crucial that we seriously reflect on the style of work in question – referred to elsewhere as “serve the people program revisionism”² - and evaluate our work according to real strategic metrics. In order to head off the possibility of our comrades taking this major step forward only to take two steps back, we offer the following summation of our work in a mutual aid organization as an exercise in self-criticism.

We furthermore advance that the central work for those formations emerging from the MCP-OC is primarily organizational. The small group left remains isolated from the

¹ c.f. Maoist Communist Party – Organizing Committee, 'Developing Organs of Political Power,' 'So you want to start an FTP?', etc. or Hammer and Anchor, “The difference between us and them: left and right responses to COVID-19.”
masses, and has failed to develop serious unity on the basis of a real revolutionary program. This deficiency can only be overcome through the summation of (and struggle over) protracted sequences of mass work, which we define below as the practical application of the mass line method of leadership.

Figure 1: The mutual aid organization’s “Free Store” program, which was initiated in early autumn using the infrastructure of one of the projects which preceded the primary food distribution work.
WHAT IS MASS WORK?

We take as our starting point the thesis advanced by the Communist Party of Peru: "in mass work the struggle for power and the struggle for revindications are two sides of the same coin."\(^3\) In other words, the struggle for revindications, the “economic struggle,” is directly related to the political struggle for power. This is only the case insofar as the outcome of this work is agitation and organization of the masses towards the construction of organs developed with the conquest of power in mind. Building these fighting instruments requires, in no small part, direct combat with the enemy class -- winning concessions or making expropriations rather than simply passing toothless reform laws or carrying out charity programs.

Accordingly, we understand the organizational/agitational aspect of mass work to be primary: the process of winning revindications should be understood as the principal aspect in the transformation of the masses into a political force under the command of a proletarian class line. Mass work, then, refers to the role played by communists and adjacent activists in organizing and agitating the masses within a given site of struggle, primarily for the pursuit of a concrete and tangible set of demands identified through the practice of social investigation and class analysis in a way that advances the long-term struggle for the conquest of political power. That is, mass work is the practical application of the mass line method of leadership.

The long term objectives of this work are to build up lasting and militant mass organization, to develop increasing numbers of people into revolutionaries and, eventually, communist militants, and to develop and apply the proletarian class line such that it leads the broad masses, rather than existing primarily as an idea in the heads of small and isolated "revolutionary" collectives.

We then arrive at the properly revolutionary-scientific – that is, Maoist – understanding of the role of mass work: "the struggle for revindications must be developed serving the conquest of power."\(^4\) Or, according to the Communist Party of the Philippines, in reference to the construction of mass organizations: "[organization] can only be formed in the midst of mass struggles [emphasis ours]."\(^5\) The key link, as is always the case for Marxists, remains class struggle. In order to lead the deepest (and eventually broadest) masses, we must immerse ourselves among them, intervening in the spontaneous mass movements while generating new ones through the application of the mass line, and working tirelessly for the construction of struggle organizations capable of advancing a revolutionary program.

This is necessarily contrasted with the dominant style of work within our milieu: namely, NGO-style economism which, lacking a basis in the class struggle (which should be the primary component of mass work), takes the form of glorified mutual aid work, occasionally buffeted with meager attempts at consciousness raising through "political education," typically consisting of zines or literature distributed with mutual aid goods.

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\(^3\) Communist Party of Peru, *General Political Line of the Communist Party of Peru*

\(^4\) Ibid.

While recruitment of new cadres for the old MCP-OC or its “intermediate” organizations has taken place as a result of these practices, that has been mainly as a consequence of their (often spectacular) propaganda value.

The real movement for proletarian revolution depends materially on the emergence of the proletariat as a political class equipped to lead. While the existence of the proletariat as an economic class is an objective social fact, the proletariat as a political class emerges only insofar as it takes up its role in the historical fight for political power.

This development into a class-for-itself does not emerge spontaneously from the mass movement alone; as Lenin describes, “the history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labor legislation.” The historical development of the working class movement is itself bound by its inscription in the social whole of capitalist society. Only conscious intervention on the part of communist militants in this process is capable of facilitating the transformation of the working class into a political force capable turning the mass movement into a protracted struggle for political power under proletarian leadership.

The content of this intervention can be nothing other than the provision of organization itself – returning once more to Lenin,

"In its struggle for power the proletariat has no other weapon but organization. Disunited by the rule of anarchic competition in the bourgeois world, ground down by forced labor for capital, constantly thrust back to the "lower depths" of utter destitution, savagery, and degeneration, the proletariat can, and inevitably will, become an invincible force only through its ideological unification on the principles of Marxism being reinforced by the material unity of organization, which welds millions of toilers into an army of the working class."7

It is only this process of organization as a class which, as a material, practical unity, gives birth to the proletariat as the leading force of revolutionary struggle; the highest form of this organization is the party of a new type, forged through mass struggle as the relation of leadership between the proletarian class line and the broader mass movement. This is why we argue for the principally organizational character of mass work, over and against propaganda work.

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6 V.I. Lenin, What is to be done?
7 V.I. Lenin, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back
“MUTUAL AID” OR CLASS STRUGGLE?

Given the preceding definition of mass work in the context of party building – the intervention of militants and activists in mass struggle with the aim of generating mass organizations for the purpose of class struggle under the leadership of a proletarian class line – the objective of the slogan, “serve the people!” should be understood as a call to utilize the mass line in order to organize the masses to meet their demands while merging their short- and long-term interests. This is markedly different from the conception of the slogan commonly advanced in our milieu – namely, meeting whatever demands can be met through NGO-style charity work in an effort to aid in the synthetic generation of mass (and “intermediate”) organizations.

The seemingly ceaseless accumulation of intermediate (even consciously anti-capitalist or 'Marxist-Leninist-Maoist') elements by the practical work of our organizations speaks to our failure in adequately grasping the strategic questions of party construction.

Instead, by carrying out non-combative economist 'mutual aid' work under the banner of "serve the people!" slogans, we regularly exhaust our objective organizational capacity and misdirect our forces towards politically impossible or otherwise backwards goals. To be clear, while mutual aid – or other forms of work which prioritize meeting needs left unmet by the traditional state apparatus or other functionaries of the reproduction of the conditions of production - is certainly helpful, for a number of reasons it should not be considered the principle objective of mass work of any type. Sober strategic assessment is necessary.

Additionally, from a purely pragmatic standpoint, we are never going to be able to actually “meet the needs” of the people in general; the communist movement as it exists hardly represents a "dual power" (which, we should clarify, is achieved through the liberation of territory during armed struggle and not through mutual aid work) which could offer a viable political alternative to the reproductive arm of the bourgeois state apparatus or its NGO/charitable lackeys.

If the primary political goal of a grocery distribution program, for example, is to “feed the people,” in the current moment it will continue to run up against the fact that, practically, the structures and resources available to the NGO-complex or the state apparatus will be better equipped to meet that need.

More importantly, such a top-down approach ultimately misconceives of the role that communist leadership should play in the mass context. Approaching the problem of "mutual aid," particularly in the midst in the COVID-19 pandemic (in which "mutual aid"
organizations have taken on an unprecedented mass character!) as though the responsibility of our organizations is to provide aid obscures the importance of organizing the masses themselves, with the goal of concentric construction in mind. It reflects a petit-bourgeois political line in the ostensibly communist camp (when not outright resulting in the formation of red NGOs).

We repeat: the main objective at this time should be to quantitatively advance the overall class movement and qualitatively advance both new and existing struggles through the organic formation of autonomous\(^8\), mass-based organizations. Mutual aid work can be constructive, under certain circumstances (for example, limited forms of mutual aid can facilitate early work to develop relationships to the masses in a particular neighborhood or site of struggle, although that should always be evaluated according to the relevant organizational cost and potential benefit) but inherently remains secondary to organizational work and class struggle. Its primary political purpose should be to enhance the struggle-oriented aspects of our work via social investigation and the identification of mass contacts.

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\(^8\) That is, independent of the bourgeois state apparatus and its legally sanctioned modes of “protest,” including the NGO-complex, the treacherous bureaucratic-revisionist trade unions or the social fascist parties.
ON INVESTIGATION

It should be clear that the correct approach to this problem was not to form mutual aid organizations under a proletarian banner or with ostensibly proletarian politics as their guiding line – which has been our practice until to this point – but instead to help develop such organization from within the masses themselves, under communist guidance, and to struggle for a proletarian line within the organizations thus formed. Furthermore, these should be fighting organizations; recognizing that the proletarian class line is by definition antagonistic to the rule of the bourgeoisie and its institutions, to limit the work of mass organizations to simply meeting immediate needs is to, willingly or not, affirm the relegation of that mass work to the terrain of charity rather than the struggle for political power. Only through combat can the proletariat realize itself as a political class; wherever possible, therefore, our work should be concentrated in arenas where we are able to sharpen the contradiction between the masses and the ruling class into open conflict, or where there are clear stakes.

Examples of such arenas are tenant or workers' struggles, or any mass struggle capable of taking on an antagonistic posture: student organizing (particularly when linked up with the workers' struggle), anti-gentrification or anti-police work (particularly when linked to the national liberation struggle), exposing and combating sexual predators/abusers/anti-women elements, antifascist struggle, etc. These arenas share the characteristic of a possible demarcation of class camps, and therefore the capacity to help develop and win a fight against the enemy through mass mobilization for class struggle. They also share the characteristic of having a concretely defined base: in shop-floor organizing, it is fairly clear

Figure 4: Distribution was conducted in English and Spanish, and included both food and PPE supplies, as well as generic home goods gathered based upon discussion with attendees.
who is or isn’t an employee, for example – we can clearly delimit the external objective conditions under consideration in an organizing effort. While in reality this will always be more complicated than the simple question of whether contact A works for employer B, there is nevertheless a clear distinction between a mass campaign which has a definite base and one which does not.

Even in the case of "mutual aid" style work, there are still ways to work towards politically productive ends, but only if that work is carried out deliberately and with a strictly demarcated base and strictly defined political goals. More concretely, distributions such as these serve as sites to propagandize around the failure of the bourgeois state apparatus to carry out its reproductive function, and to initiate social investigation and class analysis (SICA); the determination of the specific external conditions, both subjective and objective, within a potential base area and the preliminary organization of the masses (in the form of popular committees around specific sites of class conflict) are the politically relevant gesture and not the mutual aid work itself.

The UCFml (French Communist Union, Marxist-Leninist) offer a helpful description of this process:

“When we speak of an organizing investigation, it refers to the Marxist-Leninist conception (condensed by Mao in the formula: to investigate a problem is to resolve it) which considers that an investigation already participates in a process of organization, which contradicts the conception of the investigation as an accumulation of documents, a prelude to all action.”

Carrying out the SICA process requires taking seriously the essentially dual character of investigation as both sharpening the understanding of the militants regarding the external conditions in a site of mass work and as an opportunity to begin the process of organizing a base around the conflicts thus identified, not as a “first X, then Y” but by framing the investigation with the objective of organizing the struggle thoroughly in mind.

The process of investigation itself should be oriented around the construction of a coherent organizational program or set of demands, with the role of militants being to struggle for a proletarian or left-line in that context. Again, the UCFml explain, "The investigation will be organizational, not around organizational proposals, but under the general idea of a program of demands, a program of non-dispersed or punctual stakes."

This follows from the actual practice of the Chinese revolutionary experience; Mao wrote,

“‘Our chief method of investigation must be to dissect the different social classes, the ultimate purpose being to understand their interrelations, to arrive at a correct appraisal of class forces and then to formulate the correct tactics for the struggle, defining which classes constitute the main force in the revolutionary struggle, which classes are to be won over as allies and which classes are to be overthrown.’"

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9 Union des communistes de France marxiste-léniniste, “Le livre des paysans pauvres.”
10 Ibid.
11 Mao Zedong, Oppose Book Worship!
Thus, broadly, the goal of investigation should be the rallying of advanced or intermediate mass contacts within the site of struggle (whether a shop-floor or building or other potential base) in order to discern the left- and right- lines in the struggle and develop a tactics (according to a proletarian class line) which can unite the masses in order to win their demands through class struggle while raising political consciousness or fulfilling other strategic goals in the process.

Figure 5: Approximately 60 distribution bags were prepared each week, costing roughly $15 and containing dry goods, produce, and an assortment of other sundries; contents were initially evaluated based on net nutritional content, but that practice was eventually dropped. We estimate that approximately 170 individuals per week directly benefited from the distribution.
THE ROLE OF OUR ACTIVISTS IN A MUTUAL AID ORGANIZATION

At the national level, our organizational missteps stem from a lack of clear strategic orientation in the regard outlined above: that improper execution of the slogan "serve the people!" according to a practice of petty mutual aid has mired many of our organizations in a particularly toothless form of economism and closed off real avenues of class struggle, leaving us without a real strategy for making revolution.

Taking a summation of the work of FTP Boston in a mutual aid formation as data for a practical analysis of mass work in the pandemic context, we will attempt to sketch once again the question of the "politics" of mass work, principally in their relationship to the work of party building, and discuss the role of our organizers in the mass organization context.

the initial situation: external conditions and the formation of the mutual aid organization

The initial proposal for the formation of the mutual aid organization emerged out of conversation between several activists from FTP and organizers from other formations (principally anarchists and some Marxist-Leninists).

From the outset, our framing revealed an incorrect approach to the question of how to initiate mass work in the pandemic context. The proposal to form the organization was based on the observation of a "real need:" the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 crisis would mean the loss of access to a meal source for many families. The added financial burden of sourcing at least one extra meal per day, coupled with loss of income due to work closures or reduced hours, lead us to predict that many households would be facing economic pressure on two fronts, understood in terms of "cost of living."

"Cost of living," is, of course, a bourgeois euphemism – such a framing displaces the role of the maintenance of the laborer (a key element in the reproduction of the conditions of production) onto the working class itself, obfuscating the social fact that the "cost of living," is always already calculated by the capitalist class in the form of wages.

Marx writes,

"The cost of production of simple labor-power amounts to the cost of the existence and propagation of the worker. The price of this cost of existence and propagation constitutes wages. The wages thus determined are called the minimum of wages. This minimum wage, like the determination of the price of commodities in general by cost of production, does not hold good for the single individual, but only for the race. Individual workers, indeed, millions of workers, do not receive enough to be able to exist and to propagate themselves; but the wages of the whole working class adjust themselves, within the limits of their fluctuations, to this minimum."12

Thus, the framing "cost of living," re-situates a social fact of the capitalist system determined at the level of production (the minimum of wages necessary for the

12 Karl Marx, Wage Labor and Capital.
maintenance of the working class as a source of labor-power) within the sphere of consumption/distribution/exchange. Taken as a whole, the capitalist class facilitates this process at both ends (wages paid are used to purchase goods which complete the MCM circuit at the site of distribution/exchange) as a structural necessity of the production process itself.

A tension thus emerges when wages (meant to fluctuate around the anchor point of this real cost of re/production of the laborer as laborer) drop below the cost of reproduction for a sustained period of time; the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie sharpens in those instances when the process of social reproduction is interrupted in this way.

In such instances, the function of the state apparatus, to "alleviate class conflict and keep it within the bounds of 'order'" is the facilitation of social reproduction until the actual economic conditions allow wages to adequately cover the necessary real cost of the maintenance of the laborer; economic crisis leads to state intervention at the site of social reproduction specifically insofar as the reproduction of the laborer is:

i. requisite for the sustained extraction of surplus-value at the site of production; and

ii. requisite for the maintenance of "order," that is, for preventing social unrest and the emergence of the proletariat as a political class

Thus, in such instances, the reproductive function of the state apparatus kicks in: "social welfare" programs and the NGO/charity auxiliary arm of the state steps in to close the gap between real wages and the real cost of the maintenance of the worker.

The closure of schools and subsequent loss of the state-funded school lunch program – which, notably, was re-initiated a few weeks into the pandemic – therefore marked a hiccup in the normal function of the state apparatus in ensuring social reproduction during periods of economic "instability." Consequently, a real crisis for the capitalist order could have emerged, and in fact did emerge, but only at the level of spontaneous economic consciousness (and one which was not particularly combative, at that) rather than in the recognition of the need for a political struggle for power.

Indeed, it should be noted that the formation of the mutual aid organization did not even attend to the (now clearly stillborn) economic struggle which the pandemic generated. Our focus on an identified social need illustrates this failure; by (correctly) recognizing that food access would quickly become limited for many workers across the city, we (incorrectly) focused our work on a secondary phenomenon without engaging in practical struggle around the contradictions which drove the crisis (for example, housing or the workers' struggle). That is, by intervening at the site of social reproduction, we, materially, carried out the function of the state apparatus or its NGO/charity auxiliary arm. While the real economic consciousness of the masses floundered and died out in false victories won under the leadership of revisionist forces, we prioritized fostering a redistributive

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14 That is, the "strike wave" which rippled across the country demanding hazard pay for "essential workers." While largely organized by the bureaucratic-revisionist business unions (themselves an arm of the state apparatus) and hardly an example of combative class struggle, the sharp increase in labor struggles at all clearly impacted the course of state management of the pandemic, principally in order to ameliorate tensions at the shop level.
consciousness (and, as a result, a petit-bourgeois class line) which simply facilitated the circulation of the masses’ limited resources among themselves rather than winning concessions from the enemy class.

**internal conditions**

Identification of this "real need" was our point of departure; from there, we moved to assess our internal objective capacities, ultimately electing to base our operation out of a left-aligned organizing space.  

The resources with which we were initially working were limited. We had access to two potential operational bases: an infoshop, with limited physical space, located in a rapidly gentrifying, but still chiefly proletarian, neighborhood, and a co-working space in a (petit-)bourgeois neighborhood which was historically used for punk shows and movementist organizing.

Our choice to use the co-working space as our primary site of operations was based on practical concerns - mainly, having space to work - rather than political analysis. While our preliminary investigation (focusing on which parts of the city would be most severely affected by the school closures) revealed that the area around the infoshop likely faced more immediate need for grocery distribution than the area around the co-working space we ultimately elected to use, the spatial concerns won out.

We justified this decision after the fact by citing the space’ proximity to a methadone clinic, and thus a large lumpen- and semi-proletarian population nearby, but our initial mode of distribution was incapable of meaningfully meeting the needs of that demographic. We began by offering pre-packed bags of groceries,

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15 c.f. 'Sloan McDichael,' "Against Subjectivism & Toward Analytical Decision-Making," for a lucid and contemporary description of the mass line method of leadership by way of questions of internal/external conditions and subjective/objective variables.
initially sourced through collection of donations of produce from the end-of-the-night supply of an open air market, but later learned through investigation that pre-prepared food was more useful for the lumpen-proletarian population we aimed to serve. The discovery of that contradiction between our style of work and the needs of our "mass base" coincided with the closure of the open-air market due to pandemic-related concerns; we were therefore forced to shift our model and became reliant on cash donations in order to purchase groceries to redistribute, contributing to our "red charity" model while also facilitating our preparation of "no-cook" distribution bags that helped us serve people who lack access to a kitchen.

At this point, it is also pertinent to consider the subjective conditions internal to the core of organizers responsible for the initial formation of the mutual aid organization. From the outset, we grappled with the consequences of (often intense) ideological heterogeneity and limited practical experience in organizing a distribution program of this type; while we shared a broad (and erroneous) tactical orientation, as described above, our organizing committee was composed of activists from a wide number of political tendencies and only some had experience in distribution (either in the form of "Food not Bombs"-style hot-serves or in charitable, nonpolitical work). Our political differences came into sharp relief throughout numerous line struggles, especially early in our work, when we committed time and energy into determining a correct organizational structure for the organization.

Much of this debate followed from a concrete practical need which had developed out of our style of work until that point; after forming, we quickly realized that the work of a grocery distribution was divided into a number of categories, around which we set up subcommittees (which we referred to as "working groups," including 'Collections,' 'Delivery,' 'Distribution,' etc.). While this decision was necessary in order to carry out our work in an expedient way, there was a consequent silo-ing of organizers into their own subcommittees. We had no clear process for broad or top-level decision making and no easy way to coordinate between various subcommittees.

In the early stage of our work, this was less problematic – we were a fairly small group and operated as a traditional coalition, with a leading council composed of a limited number of representatives from each constituent organization. As we rapidly grew in size, and took on organizers from outside of our primary constituent organizations in order to bolster our capacity, it became clear that a new organizational model was necessary.

We therefore elected to adopt a "spokes-council" model, in which elected representatives of each subcommittee sat on a central council to coordinate between their respective groups' needs. The spokes council was vested with an ambiguous decision-making capacity, and therefore failed to meaningfully address our lack of a coherent method of leadership. It was, in essence, a flattened-out central committee structure which only moderately rectified our silo-d subcommittee structure: a central hub with subcommittees as the surrounding "spokes" on the organizational wheel.

As this became more and more obviously unsustainable, we opened debate about forming a new organizational structure that better met our needs while also allowing for coherent decision making processes. This particular question was marked by an intense line struggle between FTP's activists and an anarchist core which had formed around opposition to so-called hierarchical structures. Notably, while the contradiction between
our political analyses came into sharp relief during this particular line struggle, it emerged because we collectively identified the same set of organizational errors.

While we in FTP still reject the ultraleft "anti-authoritarian," line, it is clear in retrospect that our own line on the structural question was also erroneous. In this case, we committed to a dogmatic error of formalist defense of "democratic centralism," without a clear understanding of that principle or its place in the structure of the mass organization.

To be clear: democratic centralism is a political principle ("freedom of discussion, unity of action," and not a structural prescription. We fought obsessively in defense of so-called democratic centralism and in so doing, sparked needless conflict rather than pursuing principled ideological struggle with elements who were chiefly our allies. This speaks to a need for further ideological development of our activists, and for further study of the principle "unity-struggle-unity" as a point of orientation for our relationships to other organizers.

Especially in mass organizations – which the mutual aid organization ideally should be – the question of practical structure is absolutely critical. How we organize ourselves is part of our style of work, and decision making processes should be arranged in order to best facilitate *proletarian democratic practice* without sacrificing structural needs. While our division into subcommittees for specific avenues of work was a necessary and pragmatic choice, we believe that broad steering decisions should be made in the context of general body meetings to maximize participation from all elements and thereby ensure that the principle of democratic centralism can be applied in practice; meanwhile, day-to-day operational or logistical decisions should be made by leadership within whichever committees are relevant.

Part of the difficulty in this question remains that the mutual aid organization in question is not an organic mass organization. This is not a question of the class composition of the formation – which is ultimately external to the question of whether or not it has a mass character – but one of its organic relationship with the mass movement, properly understood. It has emerged not out of, but in response to, mass struggle.

As a result, it has remained composed primarily of already "radicalized" elements (many with a petit-bourgeois class background) of a variety of ideological tendencies; while its points of unity are deliberately broad and its membership procedures mass-oriented, its emergence as a "red charity" formation is a direct consequence of its being formed in isolation from the masses, an isolation which has continued even while the organization directly interfaces with them. It is a synthetic, rather than organic, organization.

The key lesson remains that mass work must take place within the struggle itself and not on its margins. By carrying out our organizational work outside of the struggle between the masses and the class enemy, we have neutralized our ability to effectively intervene in the real movement, generate new struggles, or win the masses over to a communist program. The revolutionary masses need new forms of organization that correspond to their desire for struggle and to the possibilities of the situation. Responding to this need is what is decisive in advancing, and not palliative "mutual aid" remedies.
APPENDIX: DOCUMENTS OF THE MUTUAL AID ORGANIZATION

1. points of unity

1. We are anti-capitalists and anti-racists. The Covid-19 crisis has only revealed already existing contradictions within capitalism; impact has been most felt in working class communities, especially Black, Indigenous, and communities of color.

2. We unite against the capitalist state and its repressive arm, the police, which occupies Black and working class communities. Even as the state offers band-aid fixes to the pandemic, we understand that capitalism is the source of our suffering. We fight for revolution and the complete abolition of capitalism and its police force. Only political power in the hands of the working class will be able to resolve the crises of capitalism.

3. We serve the people. While we understand that mutual aid alone cannot resolve the crises of capitalism, survival programs by and for the people are a tool to build and deepen our relationships as organizers with working communities in the Boston area, to develop revolutionary leaders from within working communities, and to raise the consciousness of the working class. The capitalists and their hired thugs, the police, hate mutual aid, because it teaches the masses that we are able to care for one another; it is a glimpse into the society we could build, free from the ravages of capitalism and settler colonialism.
2. “who we are; what we do”

We are a coalition of organizers who are united around the principle that pandemic is political. While the owning class – people like your boss, your landlord, or politicians – can afford to work from home, self-isolate and pay for treatment, we, the workers, don’t get that option. If we don’t work, we can’t pay rent; if our hours are cut, or the schools we send our kids to close, we’re left to fend for ourselves, and all this while the class who makes those decisions sits comfortably at home.

We know that the whole damn system is responsible – what the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed is not anything new, it’s just an intensification of contradictions that were always here. The rich get richer and protect themselves, while the people whose labor produces their wealth are hung out to dry. So we’re organizing to help meet the basic needs of our comrades in this time of crisis, and working to build resilient structures of working class organization that can continue to fight back against a system that depends on our exploitation.

Right now, we distribute free supplies to people who need it. We pass those out during our weekly serve, every Monday at 5:30pm at M--------, and by delivering to the people who can’t make it out in person. We run these distributions to serve the people in the ways that we can, but also because we understand the need to build political power and advance towards revolution. In order to do that, we need to get organized as the oppressed and build our ability to fight back; in order to even do that, we need to survive.

We are influenced by the Service to the People programs of the Black Panther Party, who understood that, while the problems facing the masses will not be solved without revolution, it’s the responsibility of militants to ensure the survival of the people until that moment comes; they called these programs “survival” programs, as in “survival, pending revolution.” We are not a charity, we are a survival program.

16 This text, in English and Spanish, was included along with the organization’s points of unity as a pamphlet inserted into each distribution bag.
3. statement on migrant justice and the pandemic

To our comrades -

Under no circumstances will [the mutual aid organization] ask any of our community members for identification of any kind, ever.

Our points of unity state that we are anti-imperialist and anti-racist; we are steadfastly opposed to the criminalization of human movement and the fascist notion of "illegal immigration." No human being is illegal. The borders of the u.s.a. settler state—and all borders drawn by the euro-amerikan imperialist powers—are the product of colonial violence and we see no reason to uphold laws which enforce them.

Part of how we adhere to this point of unity is our refusal to ever ask for identification in exchange for supplies; solidarity means solidarity with all oppressed peoples. We also unite with the call to immediately free all prisoners held in immigration detention centers and cease all ICE/CBP raids, which take advantage of a global pandemic to enforce a reign of terror in our most vulnerable communities. Pandemic is political; the ongoing fascist violence carried out by ICE/CBP against immigrant communities under the cover of a public health crisis is a manifestation of this political character.

COVID-19 has brought into sharp relief all of the contradictions inherent to capitalism-imperialism and the bourgeois dictatorship; in this moment of crisis, it is the responsibility of revolutionaries to unite with the oppressed masses and topple the domination of a capitalist class which has so clearly demonstrated its lack of regard for human life. While our migrant comrades are left to die in detention centers, terrorized by fascist thugs, and our unhoused comrades starve in the streets, the enemy class lounge in their mansions. Enough is enough!

We call on all comrades to build networks of solidarity which serve the people!

Build working class power to fight imperialist power!

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17 This statement was circulated as part of a broader local push to struggle against ICE/CBP and in response to concerns raised by a mass contact regarding whether their access would be revoked if they could not produce identification.
4. “why free stores?” statement

what is a free store?

A free store is exactly what it sounds like. Clothes, home goods, books, safer sex supplies, and whatever else we could get, made freely available for the people. We understand the constant need for many of these items, especially for workers, who are usually too broke or tired to constantly be buying and fixing what they have.

We do this for a few reasons, not only because its good to help people out, but because we know living under capitalism is hell. Being black, latinx, a woman, or LGBT+ under white supremacy and patriarchy is hell. We are influenced by the Service to the People programs of the Black Panther Party, who understood that, while the problems facing the masses will not be solved without revolution, it's the responsibility of militants to ensure the survival of the people until that moment comes; they called these programs "survival" programs, as in "survival, pending revolution."

Like Huey said, "[a Serve The People program is like] the survival kit of a sailor stranded on a raft. It helps him to sustain himself until he can get completely out of that situation. So the survival programs are not answers or solutions, but they will help us to organize the community around a true analysis and understanding of their situation. When consciousness and understanding is raised to a high level then the community will seize the time and deliver themselves from the boot of their oppressors."

So we run the Free Store to serve the people in ways that we can, but also because, as communists, we understand the need to build political power and advance towards revolution.

where does all of this stuff come from?

Most of these items were donated to the Free Store by other members of the community, the broad working masses of the neighborhood. We understand that engaging in acts of solidarity and helping out our neighbors can go farther and do more to help build the power of oppressed people than giving to a thrift store like Goodwill would (especially since they make money off of selling donated stuff to you!)

If you have stuff you want to get rid of, or you're interested in getting involved in our work, come talk to us!

what's the difference between this and a charity?

The Free Store is a survival program, part of a larger effort to build what we call "dual power." Dual power means the people and their revolutionary organizations no longer need to rely on the government that serves the bosses and landlords. In order to do that, we need to get organized as the oppressed and build our ability to fight back; and in order to do even that, we need to survive. Charities, on the other hand, are not interested in truly

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18 This document preceded the establishment of the mutual aid organization, but represents our initial, and deeply incorrect, orientation. To repeat: dual power is a question of politics, and political power flows from the barrel of a gun. The struggle for power is the principal objective of the revolution, which is to say, the objective of revolutionary war. It is not, and for good reason, the question of workers’ control or community co-operatives.
changing the social and economic systems that create the need for them in the first place. At the end of the day, charities are basically businesses.

**who are we?**

For the People – Boston (FTP - Boston) is part of a nationwide network of revolutionary anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist organizations started by the Organizing Committee for a Maoist Communist Party. We believe that oppressed people have the power to overthrow capitalism. FTP serves to unite those who are developing themselves and their communities by running survival programs to help build the political power of the oppressed.