

MARGARET'S REPORT
(MILL CITY SPEECH)

[I presented this paper at a community meeting just before I quit. All I can say about that meeting is that people are not convinced to give up power and will struggle to retain it. I worked a long time on different arguments but almost not at all on organizing people around these ideas.]

We are supposed to be the opposite of capitalist corporations whose object is to serve themselves, or more correctly their owners. Being the opposite of the capitalist system means to serve the people who do the work. In order to do this, we have to learn to work and think together with them. A problem is that those who are in the best position to be articulate about the rottenness of the system are also in the best position to absorb some of that rottenness into themselves. This rottenness is typified in a superior and competitive attitude toward other people. I think these attitudes are very strong in you, Chuck. They make it very hard for people to work with you.

Your competitive attitude is demonstrated mainly at meetings. You are a fast thinker and a fast and articulate talker. A person very confident in your own ideas. However you are more interested in winning arguments than in dealing honestly with real problems. This is also the reason you don't listen very well, and why you talk so much.

In general, you have a cold wall superior attitude which seems to be summed up in three dogmas. These dogmas are: (1) everyone should be equally responsible for everything; (2) that there is no objective basis on which to make decisions; (3) that in order to be cooperative, people should abandon their jobs in the capitalist system.

Let's take these dogmas one at a time. "Everyone should be equally responsible for everything." In concrete fact of course, this is not true; nor is it possible even by the hardest effort to make it come true. This is not to say that someday in a truly cooperative society, this will not happen. But it is to say that it is not possible to have a totally cooperative thing happen inside a society totally based on exploitation. A totally cooperative store is in fact a dream. But in the store now this dream is in fact keeping us from working together. In concrete fact, someone has had to be responsible for at least the most important things. But a most strange type of responsibility . . . all the trouble and none of the authority by which this may be done. Corporations use authority to serve themselves. We could use authority to serve the people. Everyone being equally responsible for everything has also meant that no one is able to concentrate on learning one thing well and developing that area. It is probably the fundamental reason for the well-known fact that the store becomes a tread-mill. All the time people have held over their heads that they are not living up to this ideal. They are severely criticized either for being "spaced out" or for being on a power-mad "manager" trip.

This dogma also has an effect on our relationships outside the store. People from harsher and less "moral" class backgrounds cannot make it in our store. Some of them because they have been brought up seeing the world as their enemy. Having a father who when he comes home comes home drunk and beats you up. Then perhaps going to reform school at the age of 12. Life for these people is a very selfish dog-eat-dog struggle. The dogma that everyone is equally responsible for everything is based on a certain level of money-based morality that is not equally shared in our society. Therefore this level of morality limits participation in our store to people of a more or less narrow class background.

The second dogma of the store is that we should be totally democratic or that we should follow what is called consensus. However consensus is not necessarily the same as and may even be opposed to objective truth. If consensus would provide us with a method of struggling with particular or subjective truths in order to reach objective truths, consensus would be a good tool. But consensus does not do this, in being totally democratic it places the individual above ~~the~~ struggle. Let's take ordering cheese as an example of this. There are of course many different kinds of cheeses that many

different people like. There is no way of saying who is right and who is wrong on the basis of taste. However because of various factors, some of the cheeses sell well, and others do not. Now the store is dependent both for its growth and for its providing a living income for those who work here on its sales. If someone orders a lot of the cheeses that do not sell well, and none of the cheeses that do well sell--this harms all of us. Yet because of our totally democratic way of operating, that person may be totally above criticism.

Consensus also causes us a lot of problems as far as relating to the outside world goes. This is because it raises subjective truth to the level of objective truth. Let us take the example of inviting people to a community meeting. Let's say someone raised the idea of the store carrying coffee. They could argue that coffee is a drug that many people rely on to get along in their daily lives, just as many of us rely on other drugs. They could also claim that coffee was natural, etc. However they would stand almost no chance of success as experience in the past has demonstrated.

The third dogma is that in order to be anti-profit, people must drop out of the system and build a new and better alternative. But if everyone did drop out and did adopt for instance Chuck's living and working attitudes, what would happen? Would all the necessary and important work that is done now get done? How would we go about building better working and living attitudes? How would we do this without learning from the people who are doing that work now? Working cooperatively is something they are forced to understand; working cooperatively is something we hold up as a high ideal, yet in practice is something we fail utterly in doing. It is true that cooperation in the working world is not at a very high level. But this is because corporations are using that work for their own narrow ends. Elements of both competition and cooperation are necessary for the survival of the individual in the workplace. Competition of working people between themselves furthers the interests of the owners. Cooperation of working people among themselves furthers their own interests. Failing to see working people as powerful allies right where they are, and thinking that they have to make some radical change in their thinking in order to become revolutionary is a failure to see reality as it is. The people who have to make a radical change in their thinking are the owners of corporations and the people who are in various ways tied to them for their incomes. Working people have to advance their thinking from the petty and the narrow-minded, but this should be based on the cooperative spirit they already have. If our store is to be effective in relating to this larger struggle, we must see reality as it is and not as our fanciful thinking wishes it to be.

These dogmas are not just mistakes. They are the result of Chuck being an elitist, an idealist, an individualist, and a hypocrite. They are a result of Chuck wishing to maintain his special position in the store.

How is Chuck an elitist? (1) by being egotistical; thinking he is more important than other people; (2) by not being open to criticism; (3) by being preachy; (4) by being authoritarian--acting like a boss; (5) superior attitudes--many of our problems with the kids stemmed from this; (6) by pulling snow jobs on people instead of trying to discuss things--trying to win arguments rather than arrive at truth.

How is Chuck an idealist? (1) being involved in a romantic relationship which helps him avoid taking criticism seriously and which helps him maintain his special position; (2) being opposed to struggle--alternative "getting it on" way of life; (3) ivory tower--student-professor consciousness, books, newspaper, T.V.; (4) by almost totally ignoring concrete problems.

How is Chuck individualistic? (1) If he does not feel like it, will not follow collective decisions; (2) anarchism as mask for petty bourgeois ideas--his possessiveness toward the store is demonstrated by his not allowing others to take long-term responsibility--uses "everyone is equally responsible" line to keep people from focusing on him as the one responsible; (3) takes more money for less work than anyone else in the store.

How is Chuck a hypocrite? (1) by being liberal--rejecting ideological struggle (investigation and study)