

## PW TAKEOVER: WAREHOUSE PANEL INVESTIGATION

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### INTRODUCTION

The warehouse panel met with the purpose of investigating the factors that led up to the infiltration of the Peoples' Warehouse by Steve Brandriet, and the effects of that infiltration--the April 1st coup and subsequent destruction of the PW. It is the conclusion of this panel that the infiltration could have been stopped, SB neutralized, and the coup and subsequent destruction of PW prevented. In the course of panel discussions, PW primary and secondary leadership and organizational members involved in the PW at the time SB was there were questioned about the sequence of events at PW and their role in them. All members of the organizational base took part in this inquiry, underscoring its seriousness and the necessity to hold members of a revolutionary organization accountable for the effects of their practice.

From the information and evidence gathered by the warehouse panel, it has become possible to trace the events leading up to SB's rise to power at PW and to pinpoint responsibility for it. It is important that the product of this investigation be seen as valuable material to study and learn from. As members of a revolutionary organization, we have the responsibility to safeguard the organization from opportunists, infiltrators, and other conscious and unconscious agents of the Bourgeoisie, whose purpose is to destroy revolutionary organization. By investigating our past practice and summarizing it, we can draw conclusions that will aid in our future practice. We can learn from our own and others' mistakes and take concrete steps to insure against their reoccurrence.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At the time that SB first made his appearance at PW, the effects of the wave of reaction following PW's transformation were being felt, and PW was in serious financial trouble. Thousand of dollars in loans had been recalled by coop reactionaries in a short period of time; reactionary coops refused to pay past bills; the formation of DANC cut the volume of PW sales drastically; and the accounts payable (bills) at PW were backlogged, with creditors refusing credit until past accounts were settled. At the time that Linda Harris recommended that her brother's advice be asked for ("Something's got to be done, and I don't know how to do it."), the PW checkbook was \$18,000 in the red. The shaky internal economic organization of PW made it more vulnerable to the threat of external forces. Many of the same anarchistic practices of pre-transformation days were still in use at PW. A drastic reorganization using scientific methods was necessary in order to stabilize the PW economically. Underlying the urgency of this reorganization was the necessity of an economically stable central warehouse to supply food to the developing coop movement. Plans were made to restructure and centralize the economic systems of all the progressive coops, therefore strengthening their economic base.

The PW at this time continued to be central to the ideological struggle raging in the coop system. Progressive forces in the Twin Cities looked to PW to live up to its promises and apply scientific methods in building a coop movement that served the working class struggle. One of the tactics in this period, aimed at creating concrete links with working class people, was the replacement of 'old PW workers with working class people hired in response to Help-wanted ads in the newspaper. Creating

jobs for the unemployed is one of the Aims of the Coop Movement.

It is into this situation that JF and later MR are assigned as primary leadership at PW. Their task is to deal with PW's economic problems, find solutions, put them into practice, and thereby strengthen the economic foundation of the Coop Movement. It is important to note that the concentration on economics in this period did not mean setting aside the class struggle and laying the groundwork for a bourgeois wheeler dealer to rise to power. On the contrary, in order for the Coop Movement to become a strong political force to advance the struggle of the working class, it is a material necessity for it to be stable economically, and operate in a scientific manner in dealing with the dominant economic system. JF, especially, was given the assignment to deal with the economic problems at PW and the Coop Movement, because of his familiarity with the laws of Capital. As he testified, "I felt I had a grasp of economic functions, the grasp had been tested in practice, my assignment was to put it into practice at PW and the coops."

However, as information and evidence have uncovered, the leadership at PW did not deal with the real problems there and instead turned to SB and his sister to do their work for them. The consequences of their actions have had many and far reaching effects.

TIME TABLE: SEQUENCE OF EVENTS LEADING UP TO APRIL 1ST COUP

NOV. 1, 1975 -- LINDA HARRIS IS HIRED AS BOOKKEEPER AT PW

MIDDLE OF DEC. -- JF BECOMES PRIMARY LEADERSHIP AT PW

MIDDLE OF DEC. -- CHECKBOOK \$18,000 IN RED; LINDA HARRIS INTRODUCES HER BROTHER, STEVE BRANDRIET, TO SAVE THE SITUATION

END OF JAN., 1976 -- MB FORWARDS HIS ASSESSMENT OF SB

BEGINNING OF FEB. -- MR BECOMES LEADERSHIP WITH JF

END OF FEB. -- SB PUTS OUT 'PUT POLITICS ON THE SHELF' AT PW MEETING

BEGINNING OF MARCH -- DOORS AND WINDOWS FOUND OPEN--REPORTED BY LB

BEGINNING OF MARCH -- SB IS HIRED, FOR TWO WEEKS

MIDDLE OF MARCH -- LB REPORTS SB ORGANIZING AGAINST PW LEADERSHIP AT MEETING WITH REGULAR PW WORKERS

MIDDLE OF MARCH -- MEETING WITH RAHNDERS, REACTIONARIES FROM DANC, LJa PUTS FORTH ASSESSMENT OF KO, SB

MIDDLE OF MARCH -- LB PUTS FORWARD ASSESSMENT THAT SB A 'SNITCH'

LAST WEEK IN MARCH -- LJo QUESTIONS WHETHER SB A PIG

LAST WEEK IN MARCH -- LAST MEETING WITH SB, HE THREATENS PW

APRIL 1 -- KO & Co. SERVE TEMPORARY RESTRAINING ORDER AT PW--PW WORKERS (LJa, MR, LJo) LEAVE THE BUILDING WITHOUT OFFERING RESISTANCE.

Why was Steve Brandriet allowed to infiltrate PW, gain a position of power in it, organize the PW workers into antagonism with PW leadership, and eventually move to take over PW and destroy it? Was it that Brandriet was especially clever and devious, and never showed any evidence of being threatening to working class interests? On the contrary, while SB was a skilled opportunist with a good sense of how to wheedle and flatter his way into positions beneficial to himself, he was not perfect in his deception, and as a matter of fact exposed his hand over and over again. His and his sister's (Linda Harris') practice at PW offered many clues to their real intentions, as the warehouse investigation exposed.

CLUES IN PRACTICE, DANGER SIGNALS.

1. Steve Brandriet consistently put out a bourgeois perspective on how to conduct warehouse affairs. "Class stand out the window, I want to save the warehouse." JF testified that he had frequent discussions with SB where SB laid out his view and vision. "Put politics on the shelf." "What will the bankers and business community think, that's my concern." SB's method was anti-working class; he relied on the legal system and believed that power could be acquired through simple acquisition--the coops would just grow and grow (within the system) until they were big and strong enough to take power. There would be time enough for politics--later. SB pushed 'private enterprise' to LB and was heard laying it out to other warehouse workers. He never took the initiative when he was given an opportunity to move politically but said, "I'll tend to business." At times he would appear to go along with the politics when it was to his advantage, but his behavior consistently denied the role of the working class in bringing about change--and was class contemptuous in its essence. The assessment of him made by

primary leadership at PW was that SB was not a class enemy or opportunist (not like JJ or Moe), that he was primarily interested in helping his little sister, and that he had good (if confused) motives. They assessed that he didn't understand the role of the State (though he had spent time in prison and was supposedly a lawyer), and they thought study would move him ahead. However, although he'd express interest in study when questioned, SB never did any, and showed no evidence of forward motion. JF testified, "I'll have to take responsibility for it, I didn't want to lose contact with him, was dependent on him, didn't challenge his views." LJa testified, "Objectively, we had put politics on the shelf."

2. Linda Harris told JF that her brother was in jail, had been put in prison for being a Robin Hood, stealing from the rich to aid the poor, and had done a lot of work trying to save small businesses. She told LB that he was out of jail when she started working at PW and had learned his skills on the streets. She told LJa that he had just gotten out of jail and was a lawyer and accountant. Linda Harris told three conflicting stories about her brother's prison and business experience, but JF testifies, "I knew SB had been in prison, but he didn't bring it up and I didn't question him about it." No investigation was made of SB's prison record or past practice.

3. Brandriet's actual performance around concrete tasks at the PW was

one of making commitments to do something and then not following through.

When JF questioned LH about the desirability of selling the PW building, LH put out that there were other options and that JF should talk to her brother, SB, who knew a lot about these things. Brandriet came in sounding like an

expert, and JF's response was, "Here's someone to help me, now I won't have to do all the hard work myself;" and "I said 'give me information,' and he gave me information. Sounded good, I became dependent on him, on his information." "I said, 'Take it away, Steve.'" SB made commitments and was given authorization to deal with the most vital aspects of the PW management. At his direction, with the promise of a new buying system on the way, PW stopped ordering food. This created a situation where the regular PW workers had little to do and the PW customers could not depend on getting what they needed from PW. In this situation, SB lagged and delayed in delivering the promised new buying system. He often wouldn't come in for days at a time. He was also responsible for the payment of old bills, and for developing a new bookkeeping system. He didn't deliver the goods on these, either. He instead came to PW leadership with a proposal. He would be leaving for Alaska soon, needed money to live on, pay some bills. He wanted \$500 for two weeks work and in that time he would finish the buying and bookkeeping systems and deal with the accounts payable. His practice in the two weeks was similar to the pattern he had already established--he didn't get the work done and as a matter of fact didn't show up for one of the weeks. He ended up getting paid for three weeks and still little or nothing to show for it. When asked why he wasn't thrown out when he failed to deliver, MR responded, "We didn't want to fail. We had a feeling we couldn't do it if SB wasn't there. We thought maybe he would do it."

4. In connection with his work at PW, Brandriet also displayed other signs that he was not acting in the interests of PW and the working class. He spent alot of PW money for gas and supplies, this was not checked out by primary leadership, and SB was "never confronted about money." JF, as a matter of fact, bureaucratically signed the petty cash vouchers without looking at them, so the PW worker in charge of them, although she originally thought SB's spending to be out of line, didn't say anything, assuming that this was the way things were done here. Brandriet also developed a pattern of doing work when no one was around. It must be remembered that his work involved PW financial information, a pretty sensitive area. When doors and windows were found open at times when PW was not open no one questioned SB about them, although MR and JF were aware that he worked alone at odd hours and had a connection with Eileen who had a key to PW. Brandriet's use of a tape recorder at PW was only questioned superficially, and JF was satisfied that SB was using one because that was his normal way of working.

5. Assessments of Brandriet were forwarded at different times by secondary leadership at PW and by other organization members who had contact with him;

a. An assessment was made by MB that SB was not a lawyer or an accountant. Despite supporting evidence, (the payroll taxes that SB did were incorrect and had to be redone), this assessment was discounted out of hand, neither investigated nor centralized.



b. LB assessed SB as being a 'snitch'; this assessment and others by LB were ignored. The reason that JF put forward for this was, "We thought we had an assessment of SB's motivating factor (trying to help his sister). I felt that Larry had a contradiction, needed to grasp socialized labor, property. Some of the time when he gave information, I saw it through where I saw him coming from." It is significant that LB had a material basis for judging SB; in his words, "I've been around 'snitches like him all my life."

LB's testimony follows:

"I hung around Linda Harris and her husband. We went out drinking together. They talked about the warehouse, bitched about it, said maybe they should take it over. Her brother was talking about taking it over too. The warehouse needed to be tightened up. Doors were found unlocked on Stevens Av. They talked to me, started to sway me for awhile. LJA was running off with too much politics. MR, JF, were never there. It was too loose. I walked into the office at the warehouse: Steve, Linda H, Terry, Eileen, were there having a meeting all alone. SB made a statement that if they tried to fire him, he'd call the cops.

"I told JF about it, and he said he was working with him. Working with him. SB was putting the make on women, had Eileen. I couldn't see it happening. Had her brainwashed. As soon as he came in the warehouse, all he could talk about was private enterprise. He'd talk in front of me, thought I'd go along with him. I wanted to find out more about where he was at. He was trying to get a business.

"The meeting was about two weeks before the takeover. I gave the information to JF, MR, and LJA. The doors and windows were found open one month before the takeover. The gate was broken and the garage was open one morning when we came to work. I saw it when I went there in the morning. Two days later a window was open, one day later, the Stevens Av. door was open again. I reported it to LJA, she thought she was doing it. LJA said she'd tighten up. Then the window was open again. Everyone was aware, and the window was still open. Looseness in the warehouse. I criticized for not getting business done all the time. LJA would go someplace and talk about politics, JF could be getting more accounts, but he was never there. SB was doing JF's work. Windows and stuff were still open, I got uptight about LJA being out all the time. I reported to JF, reported all the things that were happening. Got pissed off at JF and LJA, because nobody was paying attention to what I had to say. Wanted to

take over the milk collective because no one would talk to me, unless I was in study. The people in the milk collective weren't hooked up, never got together with people in the warehouse.

"Why didn't people listen to me? I've been around snitches like SB all my life. Didn't pick up on him at first, started thinking about it. I wasn't sure. Wasn't he only gonna be there two weeks? I asked JF about that. I really saw it a couple of weeks before the takeover, never talked too much before that. Told JF about it and JF said he was working on it. Wrote an assessment. What happened to it? We gotta learn to deal with people, stop bullshitting, not moving forward, letting people get in our way. I'd hear Eileen and Linda H coming off the wall with all kinds of crap. Questioning leadership all the time. They'd talk all over the warehouse, Terry too. I guess they thought it didn't matter if I heard. They shouldn't have been able to do that. We have to get rid of people like that. Told JF what I'm saying now."

d. LJa became critical of SB. Although she was uncertain and unconfident of what she saw, and feeling guilty about not having the situation under control, she put out her criticisms. JF testifies, "LJa was consistent in raising questions, I would answer defensively." LJa testifies, "I had guilt that I wasn't on top of it. My leadership was JF and MR. They put out that I wasn't in leadership, guilt-tripped me. JF guilt-tripped me. I should move downstairs (on the floor with the regular PW workers), should get out of the picture. I saw MR and JF, saw the contradictions, felt stifled." LJa put out that she thought SB was bourgeois pig, when primary leadership was trying to assess whether he was an opportunist or not. About that same time she also raised criticisms of the meeting Brandriet set up with Rahders and DANC people, asking why PW went to it; she fingered Kris Olsen as an agent, and pointed out that it was SB, not PW leadership, who was in control. LJa had a material basis for her attitude toward SB. His practice with her was heavy with sexism and class contempt; he criticized her for butting in with politics into the important work he was doing and looked down on her for not

having bourgeois management skills. But JF and MR put out that LJa was not in leadership, and that they had the situation under control.

e. LJo, upon arriving on the scene at PW, questioned whether SB was a 'pig'. She testified, "JF still defended him."

f. MJ put out that SB was organizing against the leadership of PW when he came to Selby to discuss legal matters with her. It is not clear whether MR received this information from MJ or not, only that it was not discussed by primary leadership at PW.

5. Brandreit was clearly playing on the discontent of PW workers. LB testified about a meeting of SB and warehouse workers where SB threatened to call the cops if they tried to fire him. LB also forwarded information about what the warehouse worker were saying about leadership and the situation in general. LJa also had reports of worker discontent that she brought to JF and MR. At a PW meeting where SB came out with his anti-politics, anti-PW leadership line and was forced to back down, Terry was heard to tell SB, "You chickened out."

6. Right after he was hired (early March) SB received a phone call, for John Harding from Dick Rahders, lawyer for the DANC reactionaries. LJa testified, "SB was called. SB wanted us to meet with the DANC reactionaries and their lawyer. We went. There was a struggle after the meeting over whether we should have gone. Figured Kris Olsen was an agent-they asked questions about names, relationships, at the meeting. Why did they want to know that? We shouldn't have gone. But SB pushed for us to go, and we went. The question was, 'Who's in control here?'" LJa asked that question.

All the above events occurred at least two weeks before the April 1st coup. Many occurred months before. All of them were reported to PW primary leadership at the time or shortly after they occurred. Why didn't primary leadership at PW assess the situation, the material reality of it, and act accordingly? Why did SB have legitimacy in the eyes of primary leadership while people like LB had none? Why was SB's opportunism, sexism, and working class contempt tolerated and, in effect, rewarded? Most important, why were the assessments of SB and of the many suspicious aspects of SB's behavior not passed on to CL?

#### CONCLUSION

The principal contradiction at PW was a class contradiction and the main struggle at PW was a class struggle. The contradiction played itself out between the opportunist class enemy Steve Brandriet and his allies vs. the rising force of revolutionary organization. The identity between SB and the rising force of proletarian organization was interdependence, mutual dependence for existence. SB was dependent on organization, dependent on the momentum of the Coop Movement and dependent on the many long hours of volunteer labor that built the PW to further his opportunist schemes. In turn, the petty bourgeois elements in primary leadership at PW were dependent on SB for his bourgeois economic skills, and more importantly to build for them their sense of legitimacy. As JF stated, "I could be a hot dog, and he would do all the work."

SB was a 'bourgeois pig', as LJA so aptly put it. His skills consisted of putting out a 'line' that those not grounded in material class reality would swallow. Empty promises. In the time he was at PW his position (influence) grew stronger and stronger, and the position (influence) of the

PW leadership weakened. For a time, SB and his allies became the dominant force at PW - until CL stepped in with ideological firmness and theoretical clarity and dealt a blow to SB's schemes.

The primary leadership at PW set the tone and laid the groundwork for all that was to follow. Due to the nature of their bourgeois world views (PICs), they did not meet the influence of SB with firmness and were not able to deal with him decisively. The general character of their leadership was petty bourgeois, reflecting the character of the dominant influence (principal aspect) of the contradictions (both the principal contradiction at PW, and the PICs of primary leadership). JF and MR accepted SB's leadership in essence; only their commitment to transform their world views and their connection with revolutionary organization led them to antagonism with SB when his unquenchable thirst for power became overwhelmingly obvious.

That JF and MR (especially JF) must bear the responsibility for the seizure of PW is apparent. The principal contradiction at PW was a class contradiction and the main struggle a class struggle. JF and MR's main concern while in primary leadership at PW was their own legitimacy, face. They viewed their own personal 'success' at PW as primary over the advance of the working class struggle, and the effects of their idealistic modes of thought and weak class stands are many and far reaching in their consequences. 'Legitimacy', for them, meant concentration on the appearance of being in control of the situation rather than dealing with the material class reality of it. It meant viewing the position of leadership in the most bourgeois sense—that of being on top, in a class above others.

SB was able to further his opportunistic schemes precisely because of the bourgeois practice of JF and MR. It was no accident that SB, with his

class skills, articulate rap and confident manner had legitimacy in JF and MR's eyes. It was also no accident that LJa and LB, being working class, unsure of themselves, not able to use words like opportunist or economist with ease, not possessin bourgeois class skills, were discounted as 'not understanding' the significance of the situation. The class contempt displayed by JF and MR toward LJa and LB was extended to the other PW workers, as well, laying the groundwork and creating the opportunity for SB to organize them into antagonism against their 'bosses'. These errors in practice by JF and MR were ideological in their nature, their concern for their own legitimacy bourgeois in essence, and had the effect of severely retarding the revolutionary movement in the Twin Cities.

It must be pointed out, however, that the ideological errors of JF and MR, coming from their bourgeois world views, are also a reflection of their levels of development. Serious as they were, their mistakes can become building blocks for JF and MR to learn from and correct in their practice, in their struggle to transform themselves into their proletarian opposites.

LEARN FROM OUR MISTAKES - IDEOLOGY IS THE KEY

The lesson to be learned from the seizure of the Peoples' Warehouse is the importance of struggling with and defeating our bourgeois world views. That all the errors at PW can be traced to individuals' untransformed PICs was a lesson not missed by the Organization. In the course of the struggle to defeat the class enemies, Steve Brandriet and his allies,

and to safeguard the Organization from future opportunists, class enemies, infiltrators and agents - CL launched a campaign internal to the Organization, aimed at the defeat of 20 Enemy Forces within the Organization. This campaign, and the resolution of organizational members to wage it wholeheartedly, will make it very difficult for someone like Steve Brandriet to penetrate the ranks of revolutionary Organization and commit his destructive acts.