



Preface: This article, published in 2021, discusses the need for social investigation and class analysis (SICA) following the crystallization of social crises in North America in 2020. It presents SICA as the basis for integration and organization amongst the masses. Despite being written with the aim of publishing the findings of those social investigations in *kites*, this article has information applicable to our work in Charlotte.

A Call for Communist Social Investigation a Year After the Summer of Rebellion
kites journal

Opportunities missed, claimed, and comings

Over the past year and change, a rapid succession of crises have gripped North America. The pandemic has brought premature death to over half a million people and the agonizing pain of losing loved ones to so many more. All the while, people have been forced to bear the additional hardships of social isolation, unemployment, evictions, and the despair of facing an uncertain future in which there may be no return to a state of “normal” for many. George Floyd’s murder by Minneapolis police was the spark that ignited protests and rebellions all across North America, as the righteous anger at a system whose police routinely murder Black proletarians and other oppressed people boiled over after nothing has changed despite so many killings caught on camera and so much talk of reform.

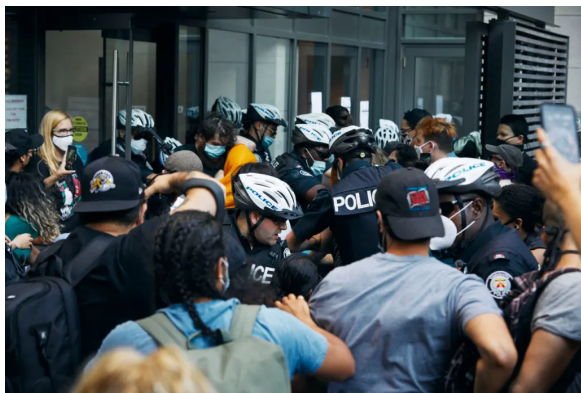
In Canada, prior to the arrival of COVID-19, yet another crisis unprecedented in scale gripped the country. On February 6, 2020, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police invaded the unceded territories of the Wet’suwet’en nation to enforce a court injunction on behalf of the Coastal GasLink natural gas pipeline, setting off a wave of rail, road, and port blockades by Indigenous peoples and supporters across



The Wet’suwet’en exercise self-determination on their unceded lands by blocking access roads required by Coastal GasLink to force through a pipeline project that was never consented to by the traditional political structures of the Wet’suwet’en people.

Canada that numbered in the dozens, the most significant of which was the weeks-long blockade of Canadian National Railway—a major economic and transportation artery of northeastern North America—by a group of Kanyen’kehaka (Mohawks) of Tyendinega. This was Canada’s equivalent to the protest and rebellion in the US, in that it revealed that in Canada there also exists the explosive potential for a revolutionary united front driven by the struggles of oppressed peoples and pulling along a decisive chunk of the multinational popular classes. Concerning the multinational proletariat in particular within Canada, nowhere has the potential for resistance and struggle been more clear than in the wave of proletarian struggles that have

unfolded and taken hold across the Greater Toronto Area since 2020, with rent strikes and subsequent tenant resistance to mass evictions taking place in and across proletarian neighborhoods like Parkdale, East York, East Scarborough, and many others. We can add to this the monumental resistance waged against police violence by victims and families of victims in Malton, where a people's movement was sparked by the brazen police murder of 62-year-old Ejaz Choudry on June 20, 2020, who was experiencing a mental health crisis when police kicked in his balcony door and shot him to death. This movement gained ground across the Peel region, and together with other struggles playing out in places like Toronto, it has revealed the vast ground there is to be gained for proletarian organization and class militancy through the present crises.



On 6 July 2020, a couple hundred tenants overwhelmed Toronto police and crashed the condominium residence of Toronto Mayor John Tory demanding that he invoke the emergency powers at his disposal to halt the impending mass evictions that tenant organizations were predicting and were about to be made easier by the passage of pro-landlord legislation Bill 184 by the Ontario government. Photo by Neal Rockwell, *The Leveller*.

Meanwhile, back in the US, the transition of power from one section of the bourgeoisie to another was rocked by the challenge of fascists both inside and outside the halls of power, and the Biden administration now faces the task of sewing back some semblance of bourgeois order and normalcy (worst of luck to them).

The sum of these crises have presented a wide range of opportunities for communists and revolutionaries to build solid organization among the masses, sharpen up the class struggle, and politically intervene in a way that shakes all of society. However, with few exceptions, the organized revolutionary forces capable of doing so are tragically absent. Left to its own devices,

the bourgeoisie's regime of preventive counterrevolution has proven itself quite effective at diffusing crises, even if the bourgeoisie remains incapable of truly resolving them. The bourgeoisie has employed an impressive "diversity of tactics" in dissipating class struggle over the last year, from the numerous progressive candidates winning largely ineffectual local and legislative seats where they have universally failed to change much of anything, to the opportunist nonprofit sector activists who grabbed the media spotlight and garnered millions of dollars in funding over the summer speaking in the name of the protests and rebellions,¹ to allowing radicals in Portland, the whitest major city in the US, to smash windows, light fires, and declare autonomous zones. Meanwhile, the prevailing form of activity among activists and Leftists has been "mutual aid," usually just charity work done with a radical veneer, which by and large has failed to build ties among the masses (it remains unclear what the "mutual" part of mutual aid is) and certainly failed to mount a serious challenge to bourgeois rule.

¹ It's a positive development that the leadership of the Black Lives Matter Global Network and other like-minded grifters are finally getting called out publicly by some of the families of those murdered by the police. Our question for the postmodernist activist crowd is: Why wasn't it obvious to you that these people were opportunists? Because they called themselves abolitionists?

In order to be in a position to seize on future crises, the time is overdue for those who claim or want to be communists to integrate with and sink roots among the masses, learn from their lives, experiences, and ideas, build organization among them, and, in the process, train themselves and others as communist revolutionaries.



Seattle's "Temporary Autonomous Zone," established with the tacit support of local politicians, and Portland's nightly clashes between anarchists and the police with the regularity of a sports match, allowed the genuine mass outrage to blow off steam, much like letting a petulant toddler tire themselves out before bed.

This coming summer presents a great opportunity to begin this process through campaigns of social investigation, wherein communists and anyone with a toe in that direction go to proletarian neighborhoods in their cities or regions, talk to and interview people about their life conditions, sum up the experience, and use the knowledge gained and contacts made to develop plans for organizing people and struggle in those neighborhoods. As more people are vaccinated, it should become easier for the kind of face-to-face interaction that this entails to take place safely. (That said, nothing has stopped dedicated proletarian revolutionaries from doing this throughout the entire pandemic.)

The crises of the past year present ample opportunities to ask proletarian masses how their lives have changed and not changed and what they think of these crises. A simple starting point for conversations would be something like this (adjusting for your geographic particularity and embellishing as you see fit):

Over the past year, we've seen rebellions against police brutality all across North America, a pandemic that's left hundreds of thousands dead and so many more unemployed and struggling, Indigenous peoples resisting all kinds of oppression, and that hot mess that was the US presidential election. We're out here talking to people about all that's gone on over the last year and how it's affected our lives. We're doing this because we've experienced or witnessed all this and because we're revolutionaries. So we want to get to know what other people are dealing with through all this crisis, what are people struggling with, and how people are viewing all these big events, so we can figure out how, together, we can challenge and eventually overthrow the system that's behind all these injustices. So what's changed for you over the last year? And what hasn't changed?

More direct questions can follow, depending on the specificity of the neighborhood where the investigation is being undertaken: "Have the police changed the way they interact with people in this neighborhood at all? Have you or your family lost their jobs? Are people around here facing eviction? Did you receive any healthcare or government assistance help during the pandemic? Did the last election change anything for you?"

Let's get our crews together and start making plans for a summer of social investigation. Reach out to *kites* to let us know your plans or to work something out! We will be publishing reports of this summer of social investigation in our next issue (*kites* #5), and we're happy to work with people on writing these reports for publication. What follows is a more practical guide for how to go about this social investigation.

How to do social investigation

Step 1: Unite a group of people to undertake a social investigation project. If you have an existing collectivity, you've got a good start, and you can consider uniting others outside your organization through this particular project. If you're not part of a collectivity, you can easily start one by launching a *kites* study group, as a number of people across North America have already done (more on this below). You don't need a permanent organization to do any of this—you can start things off by just gathering a few people around to talk about the crises of the last year alone, and you can introduce this social investigation project as a concrete example of something people can do. There doesn't need to be a commitment from anyone yet to work together in the future, and frankly, a one-off social investigation project is a great way to test out how to work together and who should work together before considering a level of organization that requires more discipline and responsibility.

Step 2: Make a plan for what kind of social investigation makes the most sense in your area. If you already do political work in a proletarian neighborhood, that might be a good place to start. However, if "going to the masses" is new to you, think about which proletarian neighborhoods have been sites of struggle (such as where rebellion broke out last summer), where the "lower and deeper" sections of the masses are (those most dispossessed and facing the sharpest forms of oppression), and where it will be easiest to start conversations with masses (a park people hang out at, a transportation hub, a proletarian shopping district, a neighborhood or housing project where it's easy to go door to door, etc.). Think about which sections of the masses you want to reach and what your crew is capable of. For example, if you live in the vicinity of a concentration of migrant farm workers and some of the people in your crew speak Spanish, organize a trip there. Avoid thinking like a dumb Leftist or a postmodernist identarian when considering potential sections of masses to reach—for example, skateboarders played a significant role in the rebellions last summer and increasing numbers of multinational proletarian youth are getting into skateboarding...but who's thinking of skate parks as good places to go talk to and organize people?

Step 3 (can be concurrent with the other preparatory steps): Do some theoretical study to prepare your crew, but don't feel like you need to study everything before going to talk to the masses. "The Mass Line" chapter in Mao's *Red Book* is a helpful starting point. Many articles in previous issues of *kites* will also be helpful, such as the *Specter* series on who the proletariat is and the OCR manuals on agitation and summation. In this issue (#4) of *kites*, we are publishing a report on a communist-led social investigation trip to Baltimore that took place in 2018, three years after the 2015 rebellion. Before that trip, the participants did a study of the *Specter* series. It proved illuminating for comrades to have first had a general discussion about class and contemporary processes of proletarianization before trying to understand it up close and in

person. Studying communist theory is always most fruitful when done in conjunction with practice. But again, studying theory shouldn't be a barrier to going out and doing some practice.

Step 4: Come up with a basic script to explain to the masses what you're doing and get them talking. You can use the one above, but you should try to focus on one crisis in particular based on the particular conditions in the neighborhood you're going to (for example, in a place with a high rate of COVID deaths, that might be your principal focus). Make adjustments to that script through practice and summation to make it more effective as you're conducting social investigation.

Step 5: Get your materials together. Something to give people with a way they can contact you is helpful. Some physical copies of kites would be good to have on hand to show people where you are sending a report to be published, and to sell to any advanced masses you talk to. Audio recording devices are of course essential, but you should introduce and explain yourself to people before you pull out an audio recorder. You should assure them you will not be using their name, and you should write down their name and other identifying information rather than recording it (no reason for the enemy to have easy access to that info). Finally, pens and notepads are essential for taking notes when people don't want to be recorded, and for writing people's contact info down (storing it in your phone makes it easy for the enemy to access).

Step 6: Organize your crew to be most effective on your social investigation trips. Having some designated leadership is important for making quick decisions and for checking in on how it's going throughout the day and adjusting based on the experience. Keeping the crew in pairs is essential for collectivity and for safety, especially for comrades more vulnerable to attack from the police or from hostile or oppressor elements among the masses. Fielding your crew based on language abilities is especially important in immigrant neighborhoods. Have contingency plans for what to do if you're approached by police, which can include a cover story (like someone with a student ID or journalistic credentials using those as part of a cover story of a student sociology project or journalistic research) and plans for how to deal with police harassment (including when it would be appropriate to make a stink and risk arrest versus when it wouldn't be productive to do so). Summation meetings are always essential to any communist practice, so be sure to follow up any social investigation outings with debriefing and summation.

Step 7: During your outings, try and get a broad survey of the different masses in the neighborhood, both demographically and politically. As mentioned above, quickly sum up what you learn from the masses to better focus your investigation and to adjust how you're presenting yourselves to people and what you're asking them. Don't waste too much time talking to backwards masses. Sometimes public debates with the backward can be fruitful in attracting the advanced, but more often such a spectacle won't do us any good, especially if such and such a place isn't our neighborhood. Focus on the people who seem more advanced. And don't write people off because they're religious (most masses are), they don't use the correct woke terminology (most masses don't), or they bring up contradictions among the people that don't fit your idealized view of the masses (most masses will).

Step 8: Designate who will do what tasks after the social investigation is complete, and set deadlines. How are interviews getting transcribed? Who is taking your collective summation and

the transcribed interviews and turning them into a written report that can be sent for publication to *kites*? Who is following up with the contacts you made and what are you intending to do with those contacts?

Social investigation as a starting point for communist organizing

Going out and talking to the masses about their lives is important in and of itself for communists. We've already talked a lot of shit in *kites* about the fact that most people in North America who call themselves communists don't do this, so we won't belabor that point here. What we will say is that conducting social investigation among the proletariat can be deeply transformative for communists and potential communists alike, and summing up the experience together will make it more so.

Writing a report which includes the words of the masses themselves as well as some of your analysis of what was learned and having several such reports published in *kites* will make this a collective experience that we can all learn from.

Beyond these immediate objectives, this summer of social investigation can be the basis for building communist-led mass organizations and class struggle among the proletariat. By summing up the experience, you should be able to identify some of the main concerns of the masses, the particular forms of oppression they face, and the best opportunities for organizing them in struggle. You should also get a sense of who the masses are, from the most rebellious teenagers to the grandma with mad wisdom to which neighborhood church is reactionary and which sides with the people. Getting contact info, especially from the most advanced masses, enables you to quickly follow up with deeper social investigation, political education, and plans for organization and struggle. If your crew is committed to it, you can scientifically analyze the possibilities for organization and struggle and diligently follow up with contacts, transforming this initial social investigation into the beginning of a more long-term effort and commitment to build political base areas for revolution in proletarian neighborhoods.

Some common objections to social investigation

Aside from flakiness and widespread (but often very selective) claims of social anxiety, a few common objections are likely to come up when uniting a crew to conduct social investigation. All of these objections are hinged on presumptions about of the backwardness of the masses. Uniting a crew for this effort will likely involve what we communists call "line struggle" over the following objections:

1) *You have to do "mutual aid" (basically, give people free stuff) before they'll talk to you.* The grand irony of this objection is that probably no one who says it has ever actually tried talking to the masses in an explicitly political way before—it's one of those dumb Leftist conventional wisdoms that has spread without any attempt to assess if it's true. This objection presumes that the masses are only capable of responding to their immediate survival needs and incapable of conceiving of collective struggle or thinking about things that don't directly affect their lives. It presumes that the best way to relate to the masses is by manipulating them—here's some free food, now listen to our politics—in ways that churches have been doing for years (just substitute

politics for Jesus). It's been done to death. For a further elaboration of all that's wrong this, read Kenny Lake's "Malcolm X Didn't Dish Out Free Bean Pies" in *kites* #3.

2) *People won't talk to you if you're not part of their community.* In this objection, "community" is always defined by what people learned in their postmodernist college classes. In all our experiences, we've found that most masses will talk to you if you have something compelling to say and don't sound like some NGO worker rhyming off a scripted sales pitch. If you are genuine and can speak with conviction, people will listen to what you have to say, regardless of your nationality, social background, and identity markers. It's true that often people will more readily talk to someone from the same background as them,² but this gets used as an excuse by people to not integrate with the masses. In our experience, a multinational crew is the most effective and makes a strong statement about who we are as communists. But you shouldn't let nationality differences prevent you from going and talking with the masses. You should definitely not be arrogant or commandist, but that's the purpose behind making social investigation a starting point.

3) *People will only talk to you about their immediate concerns and not about any questions outside of those concerns.* As with common objection #1, anyone who says this has probably never tried to talk to proletarian masses about Africom's drone strikes, the people's war in the Philippines, or the Palestinian liberation struggle. They've probably never talked to anyone who's been to prison, since prisoners are often interested in reading about a lot of things outside their life experiences. This objection concentrates both a typical Leftist "economism," which consigns the masses to only care about their immediate interests, and the postmodernist conception of community, which confines people to narrow, isolated, self-contained communities. The world, and the masses, don't work like that. No "community" is isolated from the larger workings of the capitalist-imperialist system, many people already have some sense of this, and it's our duty as communists to move people along to a deeper understanding of all this. Many proletarians think, care, and have opinions about all sorts of things beyond their immediate neighborhoods and survival needs and can often relate to proletarians in other parts of the world quite easily (that's a practical expression of what we call the material basis for proletarian internationalism). The most advanced (and, on that basis, the intermediate) among the masses can be won to take up struggles that have little or nothing to do with their own lives, such as opposing imperialist wars of aggression. While this social investigation call is focused on learning how the masses have been affected by the recent crises, we should not shy away from learning their thoughts on questions that don't immediately affect them or from bringing these questions into the conversation.

Conclusion

To those who have tried the many well-worn ruts of activism and the Left, to those frustrated at seeing world-shaking crises pass us by without a revolutionary force to seize on them, and to those who want to go beyond theoretical discussions or Twitter proclamations: take up this call

² It's also true that a lot of proletarian masses can smell opportunism from a mile away—including coming from people of their own nationalities, that the petty-bourgeois postmodernist identarian activists have made little inroads among proletarian masses (and generally aren't interested in doing so), and that ultimately most proletarian masses will judge you for your integrity, ideas, and actions, not on your identity.

for a summer of social investigation. It can be the start of a more long-term effort by communists to sink roots among the masses and develop the organizational base that can seize on future crises. And the more this call is taken up, the more we will come out of the summer with a detailed picture of the lives of the proletariat in North America and a deeper understanding of how to organize them in struggle. The comrades in *kites* are ready to assist with these undertakings and, in fact, already have some plans of our own for social investigation this summer. Email us at kites-journal@protonmail.com to start making a plan, and visit the *Contact us* section of our website to learn about the safest way to do this.

To reiterate, taking up this call for social investigation will be deeply transformative for anyone involved. For as Mao put it:

How should we judge whether a youth is a revolutionary? How can we tell? There can only be one criterion, namely, whether or not he is willing to integrate himself with the broad masses of workers and peasants and does so in practice. If he is willing to do so and actually does so, he is a revolutionary; otherwise he is a non-revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary. If today he integrates himself with the masses of workers and peasants, then today he is a revolutionary; if tomorrow he ceases to do so or turns round to oppress the common people, then he becomes a non-revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary.



At the height of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in Maoist China, schools were closed, and tens of thousands of revolutionary youth fanned across the country to integrate with the workers and peasants and unite with their struggles.