

What Kind of Revolutionary Organization Is Useful Today?

Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation

1995

The multiple problems facing the world today require a revolutionary response. The troubles faced by the oppressed—especially people of color—exist not because the promise of liberal democracy is yet unfulfilled throughout the globe, but because of inherent contradictions within liberalism and capitalism itself. Because capitalism requires the many to work for the profits of the few, modern society cannot provide full freedom for all. Further, because capital will not surrender its privileged position without a fight, the struggle for a truly free society requires a revolutionary struggle against capitalism and all forms of oppression.

Given this, the revolutionary question is: What kind of revolutionary organization is effective at this time? Historically, there have been two answers to this question. The most common is the Marxist-Leninist vanguard party. The vanguard strategy, from the Russian Revolution to the present, is to build an organization of an elite cadre of militants who will guide the masses through a revolution and lead them to a socialist society. This strategy has proven to be an utter failure because it has failed to fulfill the promise of freedom. By creating a highly centralized and undemocratic organization, vanguard approaches have reproduced these same power structures in society, with the party as the new ruling class.

The second strategy is less well-known but is currently popular in many North American anarchist circles. This strategy, which could be called the storefront approach to social change, advocates creating “temporary autonomous zones” (TAZ) of collectives, infoshops, community centers, and other countercultural outposts throughout the land. These storefronts, the argument goes, will inspire thousands of other TAZ’s to organically sprout up in the rest of society, transforming the world without a center of power or a hierarchical chain of command. This strategy is admirable for its critique of authoritarianism and for its commitment to decentralized forms of organization. However, it is unrealistic because it does not present a plan to directly challenge and defeat the fundamental structures of state power. Nor does it suggest a way to democratically bring these multiple TAZ’s and storefronts together to collectively craft a vision of a free society.

The ineffectiveness of these two strategies requires a different response. This third view, which could be called revolutionary pluralism, is the position Love and Rage has arrived at after six years of debate and struggle. It is based on our perception of what a 21st-century mass movement against oppression will look like. While movements aimed at organizing factory workers may

have been appropriate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the ever-changing landscape of capital and imperialism has grown much more complex today. The mass movements against them will inevitably reflect this diversity and complexity. The struggles of women, people of color, and oppressed nationalities throughout the world are no longer secondary to the struggle of “the proletariat” (in reality, were they ever?), but constitute the potential, in their plurality, to be the foundations for a new mass movement. What will bring these diverse struggles and peoples together? Only a deliberate effort to unite them into a radically democratic and plural movement that will maintain their autonomy and challenge the existing power structure. This is revolutionary pluralism.

If the mass movements of the 21st century are going to be plural, diverse, and emanate from a variety of locations, what is the role of a revolutionary organization? Clearly, such an organization should not attempt to make itself the “vanguard” and force the entire movement to conform to its ideology and be subordinate to its own organs of power. However, this does not mean there is no role at all for revolutionary organization, as advocates of the storefront strategy claim. The role of a revolutionary organization like Love and Rage in a mass movement is not to lead the movement but to participate in it as equals with other organizations and people. Through such participation we seek to do two things: 1) to argue for the most democratic mass movement possible, one that gives every person the ability to participate in it fully; and 2) to argue for our anti-authoritarian politics within this plural movement in order to influence it into struggling against all forms of oppression.

Of course, a plural and diverse mass movement does not exist in North America. At present, groups like Love and Rage are organizations without a movement. We do not pretend to be able to be this movement nor to be able to create it ourselves. That is the work of millions of the downtrodden and oppressed. However, we can and do participate in small movements right now, with the eye toward not only winning these smaller struggles but also toward bringing them together into a larger movement. We do this through active participation and by arguing for our politics in a free and open manner.

With this in mind, Love and Rage sees three current struggles that are not yet mass movements but that hold great potential. The struggle against white supremacy—not only against the far right but also against the principal institutions of this society (cops, courts, capital)—will be key to any revolutionary movement. Secondly, the Zapatista uprising indicates that México will be a central point of resistance to the global order in the upcoming century, and so we work to support our comrades in México and to open up a “northern front” in the US and Canada. And finally, we focus attention on prisons and the criminal justice system, not only to support our imprisoned revolutionary comrades but also to reveal prisons as the lynchpin of social control under capitalism and as a key weapon of Black genocide. Coupled with revolutionary pluralism, these three struggles offer a guide to building a new world within the complex and confusing shell of the terrible one we live in now.

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