

On Strategy: Collective Ownership and Self-Defense of Our Communities

Leadership and a Distrust of the Privileged

Joaquin Cienfuegos

December 13, 2007

Contents

Introduction	3
We're an Ulcer in the Belly of the Beast	3
You say "Identity Politics" -- We call it Self-Determination	
What kind of organization and how does it look like?	4
Collective Ownership of our Organization and of our Communities	6
Self-Defense and Revolutionary Struggle	8
On Leadership and Creating a Culture of Resistance	10
Distrust for those with Privilege	12

Introduction

This is an essay I wrote in the spirit of creating dialogue in the movement. It is a critical look at where we're at today, and where we need to be, while learning from our ancestors and those who came before us. It is a synthesis of my own personal experience, and the collective experience of companion@s organizing and struggling in our communities and different spaces. If we are serious in creating a different world and destroying this system then we need a program or strategy. We need to have a platform, and as revolutionary organizers we need to lay down the foundation for a revolutionary grassroots popular movement, because change happens through both spontaneous and planned action. This is an attempt to throw out ideas so they can be discussed and put to practice in society. Learning from the Zapatistas, "Caminando Preguntando," or asking questions while walking, I hope to engage people with questions regarding revolutionary struggle in the U.S., laying down new models of organizing (inspired by horizontalist and anti-colonialist movements as well as our indigenous models), intersections of oppressions, creating a revolutionary program. So, how do we organize for intercommunalism, build the fighting capacity of the people, and create a culture of resistance?

We're an Ulcer in the Belly of the Beast

In the United States the power structure that exists is complicated. To paraphrase bell hooks, it's a white supremacist patriarchal imperialist system. This is our reality, and this is what the system of power is rooted in. Any real strategy for revolution has to be rooted in one's own specific conditions. Since we live in the United States and anybody who calls themselves a revolutionary (or radical) has to seriously look at the situation here in the US. There is also the case that within different communities you have different conditions, and with different regions you have different conditions. We have to figure out how we can confront reality to change it, and rely on ourselves as oppressed peoples for that change -- not on the state and not on a vanguard party who claims to know what's in our interests.

So one cannot just talk about the class oppression but you have to look at the entire power relationships -- and how they affect us and you have to adapt those things into your organizing and strategy for social change.

The development of capitalism in the U.S. was based on white Protestantism and the progress of the white male protestant merchants and landowners. Their values, standards and the culture of the rulers are dominant in this society. Their agenda is guided by this culture and the preservation of their rule. If you do not reflect the power structure of imperialism (which is white, capitalist, patriarchal, and heterosexist) you are subjugated by their rule. The power structure is set up to manipulate, control, exploit, imprison, murder, and even exterminate those who do not look like them.

Oppression in the U.S. is also complex. While there are organizations out there whose rhetoric doesn't go beyond the "proletariat" (or working class) things are much more complex than that. The oppressed are those who are people of color, working class, women, queer people, and the youth as well. This is because of the power relationships that exist in this country. Where white males, through manifest destiny, sought to conquer and dominate this land. Throughout the history of this country, they have systematically killed, tortured, exploited, exterminated people

who did not reflect their power structure, who stood in their way of expansion and more power, and posed a threat to their power and way of life.

The state is used to enforce their system of power and to keep it intact. The state is made up of the police, the courts, the prison system, their government, government agencies, and even their schools. So anybody that rises up or resists the power structure will be faced with repression and also will have to take on the enforcers of the state. Not only when people rise up, but also in their day-to-day life because in their communities' they're living in third world conditions, the state is used to maintain a culture of fear. They terrorize the people who live there, throw them in prison, and murder them. Historically, the state has been responsible for the extermination of indigenous people, the preservation of racial slavery, the theft of land and the colonization of people (in particular Mexico, Indigenous people, Puerto Rico, and Hawaii), the upholding of patriarchy (where women were and still are subjugated and seen as second class citizens -- to be child bearers and servants to men), and denied the right for queer people to not only marry but to love whom they choose.

The question is how do we organize around all these different and distinct forms of oppression to challenge and change the power structure. How do we allow for autonomy and self-determination but still have a common plan and strategy for the liberation of the oppressed?

You say “Identity Politics” – We call it Self-Determination What kind of organization and how does it look like?

I spoke briefly to how oppression exists in this society, but it is not that simple. There are very unique and specific forms of oppression but there is also intersection. Meaning that all these forms of oppression overlap and affect people in different ways. For example women of color have a different experience and different positions and/or demands than say white women, and working class people of color have a different experience than the white working class. In addition, people of color and women are systematically forced into a position of wage slavery -- where they work the worst jobs if they can even find a job, for the worst pay, under the worst conditions -- which includes immigrants of color). The "white working class" historically has been used to divide, and they have sold out, the most militant movements which were those of the people of color.

In the 60's the idea was that we needed to break up into different camps (where white people organize white people, black people, organize black people, Chicanos organize Chicanos, Puerto Ricans organize Puerto Ricans) and when the revolution came we would all form a united front. I do not think it's that simple, since I spoke to the intersection of our oppression -- and our communities are diverse (especially with black and Brown communities, in particular in Los Angeles). I do however think it is necessary for the oppressed communities to have autonomy (to have independence, to have self-determination - in terms of their organizing, their vision, their culture, their way of life, and their struggle for liberation). At this point it is important for the oppressed to rely on their own democratic organization to develop their own leadership skills, strategy, and give them practice and experience in self-organization. I feel that in a horizontalist revolutionary organization, you can have colonized people working side by side, but at the same time each nation (or people) will be creating their own autonomy (or independence) while they connect and build with other oppressed people.

Dogmatists and purists attack this position because they call it separatist or they say that to do this we're creating divisions. In reality these divisions exist in society, let's be realistic, and we have to directly challenge these oppressive social relationships not avoid them. Society and this power structure have alienated us, it systematically dominates us -- we should not rely on this system for liberation. Revolution means changing the social relationships and power relationships that exist in this society that perpetuates oppression, and self-hatred. These social relationships are also carried over into our organizing or "the left" because we do not organize in a vacuum -- we are influenced by the dominant culture of the powers that be. In "the left" we suffer from what Frantz Fanon called internalized oppression (where we recreate and reflect the same oppressive social relationships that exist under capitalism).

In the "left" there is also class-reductionism where all other forms of oppression are ignored except for class. Class reductionists would attack the autonomous movements of the oppressed and call them "identity politics" when the privileged leadership of these organizations get challenged and their quest for ruling over the oppressed is threatened.

I think this all comes from who's leading and who is fighting to lead the movement. The politics of any organization will be influenced by who makes up the organization. If you have an organization where the majority of people are from a privileged background then your politics and the political positions of your organization will reflect the social position that is probably less genuine and more liberal. This relates to the left in general in the US today. The vanguard parties are led by people who have privileged positions in society, therefore there are going to want to gravitate to a leadership position and power -- the privileged (white, upper middle class men, who have had the privilege and the time to dig into politics) are usually the ones leading and calling the shots within these vanguard parties and also hold this notion that they're going to "liberate the oppressed" which is all rooted in their social position. A lot of these white folks suffer from the messiah complex. The same goes for anarchists, who in North America and in particular in the US are influenced by a white middle class male position because the political SCENE is made up of them -- and the ones who dominate within the anarchist organizations (especially within a structureless environment) are those same people.

I think that the white comrades who want revolutionary change need to start organizing other radical white people and white communities, and the same goes for the middle class people. Instead of forming these vertical, white-leftist, charity organizations, let's build strategic alliances, and give the oppressed the space to organize themselves. It is important to choose a side in the low intensity war that is being waged on our communities, and the role for settler-colonialists is not to lead in our own liberation.

So how do we organize ourselves, build autonomy, become self-sufficient while at the same time challenge power and change those relationships? These are the main tasks to carry out as revolutionaries: to empower ourselves and oppressed communities, build the structures that give people a glimpse of how things can be different and how we can organize ourselves, build our fighting capacity, integrate ourselves within the communities and mass movements, and build a political and revolutionary base within these communities -- and build the leadership skills, consciousness, and experience in collective struggle within these communities. Who are these privileged organizations to tell the oppressed how they should organize and struggle? We have much to learn from the "masses" as we have to teach the "masses."

“Although we know the revolutionary project to defeat the system of capitalism and enslavement requires millions of other allies who will help us, we will decide the agenda, the timetable, and the tactics of obtaining freedom.”

The process of developing a praxis that is effective should be important, and we should always have as principle what works for us here while maintaining our autonomy and individual freedom -- and adapting ideas and theories that help guide our organizing to our specific conditions.

The question should be put out there though, why organize amongst the oppressed -- isn't everybody oppressed in a way? Yes in a way this is true, but also there are different social positions within this system and people have different privileges. The politics of the oppressed will always be more genuine if they are involved first-hand in facilitating the process of their own liberation. Anytime you have the majority privileged folks in your organization -- the politics of the organization will become watered down-- because consciously or subconsciously they have more at stake -- they have more to lose. I draw heavily from organizations like the black Panther Party (where I disagree with their structure as well as other mistakes they made) who were one of the most serious organizations in the 60's in terms of revolutionary praxis in their communities, building dual power, fighting for better positioning within the communities, political-and self defense training, and having an understanding/analysis of race and class politics (while seriously trying to deal with gender problems in the organization). They were an organization that was serious enough that it posed the biggest threat to the US government -- so much that the state prioritized smashing them. There are many lessons to draw from that experience and learn from mistakes as well -- but one thing that you can look at is that the organization was a form of self-organization of the oppressed (a top-down self-organization not a horizontal one though, which lead to the defeat of the organization) where the politics were adapted to their communities and were more genuine as well. This posed a huge threat to the power structure and the state. While we're organizing for autonomy within communities there is a need to connect, communicate, coordinate and work along other communities for the same aims, platform, and/or demands. This is where federalism can help connect not only oppressed communities, but privileged allies who are organizing within their own communities to link up and build a revolutionary movement that has clear politics, common vision, and strategy.

Collective Ownership of our Organization and of our Communities

“When Bobby Seale and I came together to launch the black Panther Party, we observed many groups. Most of them were so dedicated to rhetoric and artistic rituals that they had withdrawn from living in the 20th century. Sometimes their analyses were beautiful but they had no practical programs which would translate these understanding to the people...

“Any action which does not mobilize the community toward the goal is not revolutionary action. The action might be a marvelous statement of courage, but if it does not mobilize the people toward the goal of a higher manifestation of freedom it is not making a political statement and could even be counterrevolutionary.”

Any organization or revolutionary movement in order to succeed has to be owned collectively by those who are involved in that revolutionary organization and movement. By that I mean, people are part of decision making, planning, and have the say so in what gets done.

A way for communities to build their self-organization is through independent community councils, where community members can meet with each other, and organize around issues that are directly affecting them in their community while (through a federation) building solidarity and working towards the same goals with other communities, and regions nationally and internationally.

The federation would be one that is specifically revolutionary -- this of course is hard to do (because realistically just because people come from oppressed communities does not mean they are revolutionary -- there a lot of backward ideas that exist within these communities). It's important for the revolutionary organization to be integrated into the community and develop collective leadership and collective ownership from within the community itself (the organizers would have to not only be familiar with the community but would have to come from within that community). There will always be people who become politicized at different times for different reasons (sometimes because they're forced by history to step up and resist as in the Los Angeles High School Walk Outs that happened recently March 2006), the role of those people is not to form a new ruling elite within these communities but to organize, raise consciousness, and most importantly DEMOCRATIZE KNOWLEDGE to bridge the gaps as much as possible in understanding and organizing experience. The federation, as a specifically revolutionary organization, with clear principles, politics, vision and strategy (where these things are dynamic and will change through the experimentation of the organization or victories and failures) -- can work within popular movements.

The federation model to connect regions, communities and entire nations of peoples is one that comes from indigenous people. From the Iroquois to the Inca. Even though our ancestors suffered military defeats, there model of organizing our peoples is more effective than the European nation-state in creating a horizontalist structure for autonomous communities and regions as well as allowing people to have self-determination. The councils and regions unite for a common purpose, goal, and vision.

Realistically revolution will not happen through a vanguard party. It will happen through the movement of millions of people. This has been the case in any popular social movement that has been successful anywhere -- the problem has been that the popular movements become co-opted by different interests that do not reflect those of the people in the long run (as in bourgeois nationalists, authoritarian socialists, fascists etc.). The role of the federation shouldn't be to try to place itself in front of the popular struggles, but have some influence within them, to raise consciousness, support, and help in the process of developing other revolutionary organizers for the long-term struggle or the overall liberation process.

The community councils are a way where people can build dual power, basically build the structures and people's institutions that would replace this system and power structure within their communities. They would organize to rely on themselves for their needs (and eventually stop relying on the state -- the police especially because they act as an occupying army in our communities). People might look at this and say that why do this -- why not just fight to get state power? This is power -- it's a collective distribution of power to those who run the communities -- we're cutting out the middle men (the state as in the police, their courts, their schools, and other agencies that make us dependent on them). In a way we're retaking the communities (which include the place where we work, associate, and go to school) -- which is where we live, and we could run ourselves anyway.

The struggle for our liberation as colonized people also has to be deeply rooted in the struggle for land. This system and this way of life have disconnected many of our indigenous sisters and brothers from the land. For a free and independent people land is necessary for the survival of the people. To decolonize ourselves we must connect back to the land, collectivize it, and learn to live off of it. Only then will we be truly self-sustainable. To paraphrase Malcolm X, "All revolutions are struggles for land." In fact this expansionist white settler-colonialist system stole all of the land that is considered America today, and continues to suppress any liberation struggle from Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Occupied Mexico (Aztlán), the Republic of New Africa (The South), the North East, and so on. The truth is, white settlers have no roots in this hemisphere, and the only way they can survive here is by a massive police and military, in other words the state apparatus. The people of this hemisphere will never be free until we destroy this system founded on white-settler colonialism and all of those who defend it.

This is a strategy for social change, where communities are organizing themselves and building a base for the struggle -- and an example of how we can organize ourselves, associate freely, and live according the basic principles of human rights -- including "to each according to his ability and to each according to his need." This is real communism in practice.

Where anti-authoritarian socialists disagree with Marxist-Leninists is in the transitional state (where the vanguard party will lead the "masses" through a stage where they have ultimate power -- into finally a stateless society where them along with the state will magically disappear and they would give up their rule). The underlying structure, and power relations that existed in the Soviet Union, and China set the stage for capitalism to not only be implemented but with a much more oppressive and repressive state.

In China, anarchists discussed the idea of social transformation, and the challenging of what was oppressive in the traditional Chinese culture, which Mao learned from and the Cultural Revolution was waged by students and peasants in China, but because of the power dynamics -- the revolution did not succeed. When Mao died in the mid-70's, the four other members of the central committee were put in prison -- the people were not empowered enough to distinguish between the different factions that were fighting for power, and afterwards the most feudal and oppressive social relationships returned to China. This would not have happened if there were different power relationships and power was distributed -- and the masses of oppressed people (the peasants, working class, women, oppressed nationalities) had real ownership of the struggle and were leading.

Self-Defense and Revolutionary Struggle

"Our insistence on military action, defensive and retaliatory, has nothing to do with romanticism or precipitous idealist fervor. We want to be effective. We want to live. Our history teaches us that the successful liberation struggles require an armed people, actively participating in the struggle for their liberty!"

In the US we have what we call a low intensity war against poor people of color, women and queer people, in particular, but against all people in general. The government is attempting to move society in a more right wing fascist direction today, but since its inception they have been killing, terrorizing, imprisoning, and exploiting anybody who did not represent the power structure. Overall they are killing oppressed people everyday and they have been doing it for over

500 years. Not only that, they are destroying the planet that gives us life, which we need to live -- all in their endless pursuit of profit and power. Since this country was founded on expansion and imperialism oppressed communities have always been a semi-colony or neo-colony. This is because they have historically and systematically (day to day from day one) have been kept in third-world conditions here inside the empire itself, within the richest country in the world. People from these communities face unemployment, instability in their living situation, homelessness, prisons, drugs, police brutality, gentrification, poor education, and the list can go on and on. In Los Angeles in particular, which I can speak of from my own experience, we can see this in communities like Pico Union, Watts, Compton, South Central, East Los Angeles, and in other parts of this country we can see this in communities like Oakland, Fresno, New Orleans, Brooklyn, Philadelphia and so on.

It is important to realize that there is a low intensity war being waged against the oppressed and has been going on and it is intensifying here. It is important to get into the question of revolutionary struggle and what that means.

I personally feel that the revolutionary struggle in order to succeed would have to be made up by a multi-faceted approach and through different tactics and a strategy (that is being developed through our experience). The community councils will not win out on their own, especially if we're concentrated in urban areas and have no support and allies from white radicals and revolutionaries and the middle class and other privileged sectors. Also from the forgotten rural communities where people are also isolated.

As we do this we have to build our fighting potential within our own communities and among ourselves. There's also the real case of the state coming down on us and trying to destroy what we're creating in our communities. It is a threat to them to create autonomous communities within their state. So what then, do we not fight back? It is important that the fighting strength of the people is raised by self-defense training and programs in the community while at the same time we are organizing around the issues that are affecting us. So we survive, but at the same time we fight, and we fight for the survival of our autonomous communities and our community programs.

I have a lot of unity with George Jackson's (of the black Panther Party) strategy. Where you build dual power within your community (he called this the black Commune), at the same time while you're gaining popular support within these communities, you're preparing and training to defend yourself from the state -- because most likely they will try to smash us. Through the collective experiences of struggle of the people within the communities they would support each other and carry out a social revolution -- and this will probably turn into a civil war between the state along the enforcers and supporters of this system and the popular movements, and the federation of revolutionary community councils. So, there is a need to have two wings: one that organizes the community programs and popular support and the other that is hidden from the eyes of the state that builds the fighting capacity and fighting potential of the revolutionary organization and the community itself. At first the second wing does not have to be large, and can be broken into decentralized cells of 3 to 5 people (who know and trust each other), training and taking direct action against the state (while raising the level of combativity it is important that we do not allow that these forces attack our people, our communities, and/or smash our foundation).

The idea of an armed people was also put to practice by anarchists in the Ukraine during the Russian Revolution through people's militias -- where they elected their own officers, who

defended and were made up of people from the community councils. One of the organizers from that period was Nestor Makhno. At the end they suffered betrayal and a military defeat by the Red Army. I have a lot of unity with this model for organizing a defense for our liberated spaces.

In any military aspect of organizing there's a need for expertise (as in people who have experience and training in military strategy and other aspects needed for self defense), in Chiapas the EZLN makes up the military component of their autonomous communities, and the army is under direct control of the bodies of community decision making. Another example where military expertise was important was in the Los Angeles chapter of the black Panther Party. Geronimo Pratt had experience in the military and even was a Vietnam War veteran. He was able to train other panthers in what he knew, as a result, the Los Angeles office on 41st and Central was barricaded with sand bags and all of their members were trained. When the police attempted to attack their office, the panthers were able to hold them off, with the help and the support of the community. If it wasn't for that expertise they would have all been killed by the LAPD. I think learning from all these different models is important.

Our movement has not yet reach the military stage yet, but that does not mean we should not discuss this question seriously or leave our guard down. Armed struggle, as in non-violence, is a tactic in an overall strategy for systemic change. We not only have to look at it when it comes to self-defense (which is the ultimate reason for people's militias and a democratic military structure) but that armed struggle in opposition to US imperialism is justified not only because they are killing us on a day to day basis here (and it is a struggle for our survival -- as oppressed people in particular and humanity in general), they are also killing millions more around the world through its military and its "free" market.

At the same time we should not uphold and romanticize the culture of violence or the culture of the gun, but see it as a tactic to within the overall revolutionary movement. On the other hand oppressed communities will decide ultimately what kind of tactics they would take up and carry out. To paraphrase Ward Churchill, "its chauvinistic for someone who is privileged in America to be telling colonized people how they should be fighting for their liberation."

On Leadership and Creating a Culture of Resistance

In terms of leadership, I feel that the best way to lead is through example. If your organization is truly integrated with the people -- and you're sincere in the revolutionary process, you're building solid relationships, building a base united in tactics and strategy, and building real structures that will replace this system (people's institutions) -- then people will join the movement and revolutionary organization. Illegitimate authority is people imposing themselves and self-appointing themselves as the leadership -- who act as representatives for the rulers of this political, economic and social system.

There's also a need for specifically revolutionary organization to provide the individual development of organizers and raise the level of consciousness through different forms of education (in particular popular education). Creating a culture of resistance means creating an atmosphere in society where new ideas and new forms of relating to each other are being discussed and practiced and is not hidden from people. Doing this will challenge many people to change themselves in the process of changing the world.

Creating a culture of resistance does not mean creating counter culture that is isolated from people. It means creating something new, while integrating ideas to people's history and experiences. Many anarchists do not have an understanding of the importance of adapting the ideas of anarchism to culture and specific conditions -- again because of their position in society and because "European anarchists historically have opposed the association of culture and anarchism." They want to make anarchism out to be something that was just discovered by our "founding fathers" Bakunin and Kropotkin, when in reality all of these socialists studied indigenous cultures who practiced communism without calling themselves communists, when the most successful revolutions and the most successful anarchists have been the ones that are able to adapt their ideas and integrate them to the indigenous cultures. While claiming that "traditional anarchism" is one thing and not really analyzing how not only things have changed, but why is it that the anarchist scene is dominated by privileged people. Anarchists or other organizations that do not take these politics seriously or don't want to develop an analysis on these questions, I consider no more than a historical re-enactment society and club (trying to relive history). I do not take them seriously; I see them as bourgeois and liberal anarchists who intend to make these ideas inaccessible to the oppressed today. However, that does not rule out the possibility for people to develop and grow through their own trials and failures, which I am hopeful for.

In terms of building a culture of resistance there is a lot to learn from the Chinese anarchists. Mao Tse-Tung co-opted principles and ideas from the Chinese Anarchists. They promoted popular education -- where they broke down complex theories for peasants (of course we have to do it where we don't patronize people). To do this is much harder than to just regurgitate what you've read in a book. You need a real grasp an understanding of our vision, our strategy and our program. This is much harder than to just spit out dates and numbers to people -- and just repeat what you've read somewhere.

"It was anarchists who first pointed to the crucial role that the peasants must play in any serious revolutionary attempt in China, and Anarchists were the first to engage in any serious attempts to organize the peasants."

Chinese students studying in Tokyo formed a group that rooted its anarchism in political traditions native to Asia and advocated a peasant-based society built around democratically run villages organized into a free federation for mutual aid and defense.

There were some problems with a different Chinese anarchist group that studied in Paris which was influenced by European anarchism. This group took a traditional obscure anarchist position on the nation-state and that there wasn't a need to integrate your politics to your specific conditions and the culture locally:

"While consistent with the stance of the global Anarchist movement at the time, this position elicits mixed responses from modern Anarchists, many of whom see revolutionary potential in the struggles of oppressed ethnic and racial groups. In terms of the Revolutionary project in China, Ward Churchill cites the declarations of support for ethnic self-determination for China's ethnic minorities which the Communist movement made as key to winning their movement the support of those groups; which was to prove decisive during the later civil war between the Chinese Communist Party and the Nationalists."

"It is ironic that the Anarchist movement, which is based on the idea of local political and economic self-determination -- and thus fulfills the autonomist aspirations of those groups -- was unable to articulate to minority communities how their desire for self-determination would be realized within the context of an Anarchist society."

Distrust for those with Privilege

“As far as I’m concerned the only reasonable conclusion would be to first realize the enemy, realize the plan, and then when something happens in the black colony-when we’re attacked or ambushed in the black colony-then the white revolutionary students and intellectuals and all the other whites who support the colony should respond by defending us, by attacking the enemy in their community...

“As far as our party is concerned, the black Panther Party is an all black party, because we feel as Malcolm X felt that there can be no black-white unity until there first is black unity. We have a problem in the black colony that is particular to the colony, but we’re willing to accept aid from the mother country as long as the mother country [white] radicals realize that we have, as Eldridge Cleaver says in “Soul on Ice”, a mind of our own. We’ve regained our mind that was taken away from us and we will decide the political as well as the practical stand that we’ll take. We’ll make the theory and we’ll carry out the practice. It’s the duty of the white revolutionary to aid us in this.”

In oppressed communities there is what I feel is healthy distrust for people who they see reflect the power structure or their direct oppressor. People of color distrust white people, women distrust men, and workers distrust middle management. Whether this comes from a place of consciousness or not it is something that has been built based on our own experiences. That is real, personally every authority figure I have dealt with has been white (and have had other forms of privilege as well). So this is ingrained in the psychology of colonized and oppressed people that we have to follow the white male capitalist authorities. This distrust is seen by oppressed people as a means for their own survival as well.

So how can we work together? I feel that people who have a privileged position in society have to gain the trust of the oppressed communities. They have to prove themselves through their actions not just their words that they are in solidarity and they are real allies. What has been my experience is that some sincere white middle class person has done things that have unconsciously been racist. As in this one case, an ex friend was picking me up, from my neighborhood in Boyle Heights -- and she wanted to get some liquor. She was coming from Westwood, so she tells me “I should just get it over there, usually they have liquor stores in the ‘bad’ areas.” So I called her out on it because she was basically suggesting that Westwood is the “good” area and where I live in my community is the “bad” area. Finally she got defensive and called me a reverse racist -- not understanding that racism is institutionalized and has to do with power and white supremacy (things have been cleared up since then).

I do not have the position that white people or privileged people are born evil or are devils -- they are socialized. The problem is the system of capitalism and these fucked up social relationships. Realistically though, this socialization of people is something that is real and that is ingrained in the psyche of the privileged. There are feelings of superiority and hostility towards people of color that is deeply ingrained into the minds of white people. With that white males have a self-imposed right to power. The same goes with middle class people of color and sell-outs.

It has also been our experience in anarchist organizations, working with privileged white middle class activists -- that when every time the situation becomes real for them, where the state comes down on the organization they pull out, or they do things which have repercussions within oppressed communities without having to suffer the consequences for their actions -- but people of color, working class and women do. Before they leave they had tried to position themselves in

the leadership which comes from the socialization of white males (or middle class/upper middle class people) to lead in society in general. White upper-middle class men need to take responsibility and challenge their privilege-- not just in words but through their actions and their conscious participation and organizing other privileged people to do the same. Their role is to be in solidarity with the oppressed -- not to lead their struggles.

Through a federation we can organize with each other and have autonomy as well -- the responsibility falls on each other to organize within our own communities and support each other in fighting for liberation. These questions are huge and we need to dig into them more -- as in building a real movement for systemic change -- and the role that revolutionary anarchists and anti-authoritarians can play in adding a revolutionary platform for the popular movement and organizations in our communities.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Joaquin Cienfuegos
On Strategy: Collective Ownership and Self-Defense of Our Communities
Leadership and a Distrust of the Privileged
December 13, 2007

<http://anarkismo.net/article/7075>

theanarchistlibrary.org