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Class Unity and POC Autonomy Is The Only Real Solidarity

Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin

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If there is going to be real class unity or solidarity, there is no way forward for white Anarchists, Socialists, or autonomous people of color except to recognize the necessity of organizing movements based on new conceptions of class and race. We have to reject the hypocritical Anarchist or white radical rhetoric that Autonomist movements are somehow based mechanically on race and that a “mainstream” white radical movement is based on a superior conception of class or political unity. The conditions of Blacks and peoples of color require a new political assessment, and must be made a cardinal part of any radical tendency.

We demand our right to be culturally and politically different and further demand that white Anarchists/radicals respect our right to disagree on political questions and to take a separate path based on one party's interests in opposition to the other. I am not talking about racial separatism, nor will I give in to yet another useless coalition, which like most Black-White

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coalitions have been organized with the whites truly dominating because of their access to superior resources and by having more political access.

I am talking about a situation where POC Autonomist forces unite with white radicals when there is unity on a particular political issue, but then they must have respect for our autonomy at other times when we disagree or want to go our own way. So people of color creating autonomous movements, instead of just joining white radical groups, is a reflection of their own racial exclusion inside white-dominated movements, as much as it is about local organizing, cultural autonomy, or political differences.

Now one thing white radicals must give up is the idea that the whole struggle hinges around white workers on their own deciding en masse to reject capitalism and racism. This fable will supposedly occur as the result of some kind “catastrophic event” or social crisis that brings out the “revolutionary marrow” of white workers, according to white radicals. The truth is that there has been a series of major depressions, two world wars and other catastrophic events and it has not caused a white-led revolution in 400 years of the American Republic, unless you count that series of events during the 1770’s, which did free white folks from England colonialism while they themselves continued to hold slaves!

The fact is white folks in America have been a good guard dog for the stolen wealth of American capitalism, so long as they got their share. White immigrants were left out of the white “club” and were considered “dangerous” foreigners. They were subjected to the cruelest class and social conditions. In the early 19th century, the White Anglo Saxon Protestants looked down their noses at Italians, Poles, Jews and East Europeans. These immigrants weren’t considered white, but “social vermin,” unpatriotic and a “dangerous economic class.” However, when these estranged peoples got white political power and respectability, they were given a form of ethnic entrée’. Over

where they are fully empowered is absolutely essential. This should be elementary, not a problem to be debated endlessly, or evaded altogether.

the course of time, after having been accepted or worked their way into the “club,” they adopted the same prejudices towards Blacks and other peoples of color, as the worst WASP cultural snob had held against them.

White radicals know this, but many persist with this fiction of a “heroic white working class”, who are supposedly so tolerant and willing to work on an equal basis with Blacks. The truth is that there are no saviors coming from the white mother country to save Black people, we are responsible for our own liberation. They may be white allies who will work with us, but we will let only them work with us for equality, mutual aid and self-respect, not white self-interest.

History has proven that only when the slaves or the oppressed peoples themselves rebel, can the whites in sympathy support them, perhaps enough to turn the tide. The very idea that they (whites and peoples of color) are coming together because they “like each other” or the whites want to “show they are not racist” is the most sophomoric liberalism, rather than any revolutionary ideology at all.

Only when one understands that she or he is part of a revolutionary movement to restructure society, even if it only wins immediate gains in the early stages, can the talk of functional “unity” be given any credence whatsoever. Of course, such a movement cannot be white-led, which has its own tremendous negative implications and results. Rather than swallowing a false or romantic view, I will say that the only way Black/POC and white people can really work in cooperation is when there is shared leadership, interests and risk taking inside a mass movement for racial and social justice, rather than in civil society generally.

A white-led movement cannot ever be allowed to usurp the basic role of people of color themselves to fight for their own freedom. The paternalistic idea that whites know what is best for peoples of color is virulent in the European, American, UK and South African Anarchist and Left movements. They even

try to get members of color to submit to a political “loyalty oath” around issues of race, so that it will not become an internal issue. Let’s be honest: like many white people in a racist society generally, they try not to discuss such issues unless they firmly control the agenda and format. Again, they fear a challenge to their own racism.

For the most part, not only do the white radicals tolerate tokenism, rather than empowerment of POC in the Anarchist movement, they have wholly different ideas about fighting racism. They do not deal with the state’s mass imprisonment of the poor and Black youth, police murder in the streets, infant mortality, or massive poverty in communities of color. Instead, they see racism as discrimination in individual cases, marginal vigilante racist groups, or just something that the ruling class “uses” as a strategy to split Black from white. But these are concerns about racism from a white perspective, not from those actually victimized.

So, activists of color must bring the issue to them, based on our political understanding, experiences and based on our actual condition of oppression. We must be clear that although we may believe in many things together, we must lead the fight for our own freedom. White people still don’t fully understand you can only build a mass movement for total social change when the poor and oppressed peoples of color are leading it, not privileged white workers and activists. We can work with anyone, but only on conditions of principled unity and shared interest, not because of liberal racial clichés of ...” it’s a good thing we’re all together in the same room”, “we’ve got to love one another...or “we’re all in the same boat.” The Black movement and the movements of other peoples of color need allies in its battle against the racist Capitalist class — not the usual White liberal or phony “radical” support, but genuine revolutionary working class support and solidarity, otherwise called “mutual aid” by Anarchists. The basis of such unity however must be principled and be based on class interest, rather than

liberal “guilt tripping,” “do good-ing” or opportunism and manipulation by liberal or radical political parties.

The needs of the oppressed people must be the most important consideration, because they want genuine support, not fakery or leftist rhetoric. There is much distrust of White radicals among Black people because of years of these radicals’ misconduct in communities of color and improper dealings with activists of color. White radicals have always seen the issues revolving around their concepts of the white working class “coming to its senses”, recognizing its “historical mission as a leading class and saving us all”. How noble, but how wrong!

We believe that Blacks and people of color in America throughout the world must begin to organize autonomous movements among their own peoples, they cannot defer to white activists. No one will hear and act in response to our cries for help and no one can do that work in our communities that we alone can only do. One reason there are so few Blacks or Anarchists of color is because the movement provides no means to reach people of color, win them over to Anarchism or Socialism, and help them organize themselves. This must change if we want the social revolution to take place in America and if we want North American Anarchism or Socialism to be more than just another “white rights” movement. I have never understood why others have not had a problem with this. The failure of anarchism and socialism to build a racially and ethnically diverse movement is one of its greatest failings. It may yet doom the entire movement to defeat.

So Anarchists [and progressives] will have to get their own houses in order before they can effectively build an anti-racist movement to educate or organize other whites, and unite with POC on a principled basis. Because of internal racism, too many activists of color are starting to talk critically about the class and race flaws in the contemporary Anarchist, progressive and anti-globalization movements for it to continue to be ignored. Inviting peoples of color into the movement, but on a basis