

# I'm Not Joining Your Party, Affinity Group, or Mutual Aid Project

**From communist to anarchist, tankie to Maoist to Trotskyite, insurrectionary to social ecologist, the left can only agree enough to engage in one thing:  
trans/misogynistic violence**

Sarah Harpy

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This is neither a litany against organization nor a call to abandon all hope. This is instead a call to abandon patriarchy and all the ways that we rebuild it in radical groups and movements. It is a call to abandon men, the “muscles and sinew” of patriarchy. Most importantly it is a call to connect and organize as trans women, as women full stop, as feminized subjects, and to dissolve the hetero-settler mortar that keeps the american prison house of nations together.

As I write this the 2024 election crawls along outside. The fourth or so “most important election in our lifetime” that I can remember, there’s very little left to say to those who still mask their desperation to preserve the status quo in progressive language. Instead I want to address those self righteous so-called revolutionaries currently bashing their heads against the wall by trying to use this moment to build their preferred leftist sect (or worse, those leftist sects that insist they are in fact “post left” and somehow different). To those aspiring revolutionaries I have this to say: I’m not joining your party, affinity group, or mutual aid project, and no women should.

The left now is in absolute shambles, the remnants of a promising but ultimately fruitless ten years of radical upsurge that started with the whimpers of Occupy Wall Street in 2011 and culminated in the furious George Floyd-Breonna Taylor uprising in the summer of 2020. The current holdovers, whether they’re communist party builders or mutual aid groups or wannabe insurrectionaries, can’t even acknowledge that something has shifted, can’t analyze their own failure, and most notably have no explanation for why no women stay in their groups for longer than a few months.

Instead they make Instagram infographics telling people to “join a principled organization” or donate their ill-gotten privilege to mutual aid groups. What good is this when just about every “principled organization” on the neocolonial left has not one or two but numerous sexual abuse scandals hidden in every single closet of their community centers and bookstores? In 2022 the Maoist group the Committee to Reconstitute the Communist Party USA (CRCPUSA) dissolved rapidly when the majority of the organization quit and revealed that the group had for years been systematically abusing its women cadre. As of 2023 many of the men from the CRCPUSA

had come forward to tell their stories but, one former cadre told me, almost none of the women had surfaced yet.

Even more emblematic of our moment is the case of former Palestine Action US leader Fergie Chambers. A millionaire and self described Marxist-Leninist, Chambers came under intense scrutiny last year after it came out that he was pushing the young women in his employ as members of his group to take profound risks (some caught felony charges) while he stayed safe and rich on the sidelines. When the heat from below got too severe he fled to Tunis and converted to Islam (a common and very orientalist move for western revolutionaries who hate women more than they love freedom). He still blesses us trannies in the west with the occasional scolding for our degeneracy, claiming that the Palestinian resistance would be better off if we kept our faggot noses out of it. Right wing anti-imperialism, even when it wears a red flag, is more about disciplining women than anything else.

And what distinguishes mutual aid from evangelical charity? I've asked the recipients of our old mutual aid groups what the difference was from their perspective. They liked us better because we gave out cigarettes along with sandwiches but other than that there was no difference. Sure what we were doing was nice, but it didn't get anyone anywhere. We were just another group out there peddling salvation. People were grateful for the supplies but happy to ignore what we had to say. Certain anarchists might say that political agitation isn't the point of mutual aid, that simply helping your neighbors is politics enough. This isn't mutual aid though, it's charity, mutual aid's supposed opposite. Expropriating funds or medication or food and distributing it in a way that teaches people to do it themselves? Now that would be mutual aid.

In a larger sense mutual aid groups came to be emblematic of counter-insurgency in the months after the George Floyd-Breonna Taylor uprising. Tens if not hundreds of thousands of young people, very notably young women, trans and cis, were drawn into political action for the first time. For months people across the empire, especially Black youth, engaged in running street battles with the pigs. When that momentum inevitably died down, rather than regrouping in militant formations that could continue the fight in a real way, the old guard of anarcho-liberals drafted the young militants into mutual aid groups. In these groups the anarchist men made the decisions and the young women did the cooking and distribution. As if this wasn't bad enough, these collectives frequently served, then and now, as pools of potential prey for anarcho-predators with a taste for young women.

This is why the last year of activist motion has been different. In spite of widespread opposition to the genocide that the zionist state is committing in Gaza, the solidarity movement has only managed a handful of real actions. Large-scale marches and popular direct actions have stagnated into bickering and electoralism. Leaving aside the right wing anti-imperialists who blame this on the degeneracy of first world queers, the popular excuse for this is usually something about the privilege of first world activists, with an emphasis on women. The inevitably male resistance martyrs in Palestine are fighting and dying in Gaza and the West Bank every day, why can't the privileged women in the movement here get it together?

This isn't to denounce the Palestinian resistance. It is absolutely right to rebel and it is by their bravery that Gaza has not yet been entirely wiped out. Nor is it to let the first world labor aristocracy of the hook for our ill-gotten privileges. The relative comfort of our bourgeois nation is definitely playing a part in keeping resistance to genocide tame. This is only a fragment of a real explanation though. Social movements are built by women, full stop. Show me any social movement in history, whether leftist or rightist, and I will show you the women who built and

sustained it. So, in the aftermath of a ten year period in which the left proved to be little more than a vehicle for bored, petty bourgeois men to prey on women, why would a new social movement thrive?

It doesn't matter how righteous the cause is either. Surely right now one would be hard pressed to find a more righteous cause than the fight to stop the genocide in Palestine. Rather than approach this moralistically by judging the women who are hesitant or outright refusing to get involved we have to analyze the material conditions that are currently driving women from political life. Men are those material conditions. Men found and join leftist organizations not to fight for their own liberation but mostly out of their own boredom. That's why they use the movement like a dating app, to them it's the same as going to a bar or a show. It has little to nothing to do with liberation for them. Maybe this was different in the 60's, but in the era of neocolonialism many drives for liberation, even for the oppressed nations, conceal authoritarian and patriarchal trends.

Women join radical groups for entirely different reasons. Historically it was through experience working in the Black civil rights movement that women first gained the experience and consciousness that became second wave feminism. The feminist upsurge of the 1960's and 70's was sparked by the Black nation's struggle for freedom. Now too, women join radical groups out of a vested interest in liberation. In struggling for the freedom of others or for everyone women gain the knowledge and skillset to struggle for our own freedom. Sure there are women who are opportunists and grifters, careerists and social capitalists, but the masses of women who were activated from 2011 to 2020 were by and large searching for something real.

We didn't find it though. What we found was an entrenched political subculture of men and their worthless, constantly bickering sects. Whether it was the Party for Socialism and Liberation, a group that amounts to little more than a rape cult who can reliably be found at every single march and protest, the various informal anarchist groups and their rotating cast of rapist micro celebrities, or any number of ideologically indistinguishable groups of sex pests and their apologists. They funneled our eager sisters into their ossified, authoritarian groups and scenes, chewed us up, and spit us out. So after ten years of that, why would anything flourish now?

The revolutionary wings of feminism had been well and truly clipped decades before the conditions that called us to the streets matured. We had access to the accounts of women on the New Left of the 1960's, many of whom experienced the same shit as we did, but we were living in the wreckage of their feminist movement, so we were completely disoriented as to what to do about it. So, conditioned by patriarchy and unaware of our history, we walked into the same snares as our foremothers, completely ignorant to the voices trying to steer us the other way.

Trans women, as the members of our nations and classes with the least to lose, have been at the forefront of these disasters disguised as organizing efforts over the last decade. Very rarely though have we been organizing on our own behalf, inevitably taking grunt positions in other liberation movements with the hope that one day the favor might be returned. It never is though, and now the left has exposed its antipathy towards us on a large scale. As one sister of mine put it, we're expected to fight the hardest for everyone else and still we're painted as pink washing fifth columnists. We are not quitting the movement, we're being drummed out.

When that Maoist cult the CRCPUSA dissolved I managed to get in touch with a couple of the women who were leading the charge to expose the leadership. We talked at length about our experience in party building and Maoist organizations, the big men who imagine themselves to be the next Lenin or Mao, and the treatment of women in leftist groups across the board. Each

of them told me they were going to disappear after they finished their work, go back to school maybe, do something worthwhile. I told them both that I understood, that I hoped that I would hear from them again some day when they were ready to try again, this time without the pigs. So far I've heard nothing.

So there's no reason to expect the calls by the remnants of a dead era to go heeded by many women. Exhausted and overwhelmed, we have largely stepped out of revolutionary work. We will not join your party, your affinity group, or your mutual aid project. We can barely manage to do what we should be doing, namely banding together as women and getting shit done without letting any men get in the way. It was taken for granted in the past that there would be women only groups, but those days are long gone. The victory of the settler wings of feminism and the neocolonization of women as a class have forced us back into raw deals with the misogynistic left.

Trans women especially need to be getting together, experimenting with new forms of organization, building our own autonomy. Only once we've done that, when we're organized effectively as a people, can we meaningfully be involved in any kind of cross-gender alliances. We need to be self sufficient enough that we can hold our own in dealings with members of the oppressor classes. Coming from a place of internal weakness guarantees that we will let patriarchal lines win out and that isn't a mistake we can afford to keep making.

Almost ten years ago, when I first got involved with party building efforts, a trans woman I knew put it this way: build the party, but build it with an eject button.

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