

Love and Rage Now

How the internal documents of a defunct anarchist group can change your revolutionary life

Suzy Subways

In the 1990s, the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation helped build strong, radical groups like Anti-Racist Action and SLAM, movements for queer liberation, reproductive freedom and more. Yet when activists disrupted the WTO in Seattle, LnR had been dead for a year and a half, leaving our mistakes to be repeated, our lessons forgotten. That's what spurred my old comrade Roy San Filippo to put together a book of LnR's writings, *A New World in Our Hearts* (AK Press, 2003). Although 19 of the 20 pieces are by men — meaning vital insights from women are missing — the book revives valuable debates cut short by LnR's split in 1998.

Love and Rage was always on the anarchist movement's fringes. Yet we ended up splitting on two questions that are hot topics among anarchists today: whether anti-authoritarians can learn from other revolutionary tendencies, and how racism relates to capitalism. Most of the writings in *New World* deal with these two issues.

I was of the quiet majority in the middle on the first question. Solidly an anarchist, I'd worked three years with excellent, principled organizers of various communist and nationalist stripes for access to education at CUNY. I'd learned a lot from them about strategizing for revolution and building multi-racial, democratic participation while engaging in a reform struggle. Chris Day (New York LnR) wrote "The Historical Failure of Anarchism" after Marxists we worked with challenged him on anarchism's weaknesses. The feisty document put many Love and Ragers on the defensive but inspired others to study revolutionary history for ideas to move us beyond Bakunin.

It was an internal document by Jessica (New York LnR) that won me over to "mass line" from Maoist theory. The Zapatistas called it *mandar obedeciendo* — leading by obeying. Jessica gave examples from LnR's activism, explaining that we worked best when our politics responded to the communities we worked with: "We cannot discount the ideas of the people...only when we start from where the people are at, and struggle with them to make the changes they want, can we put forward the ideas of anarchist revolution with any effectiveness." She also pointed out that the LnR members most hostile to borrowing ideas from authoritarian tendencies were not doing any activist work — which explained why they offered no concrete solutions, only generalizations that our problems could be solved "from within anarchism."

Most Love and Ragers agreed that anarchism itself — having adopted feminism, queer liberation and environmentalism — is multi-tendency. A majority also supported the theory of white skin privilege, that the white working class has real benefits under racism — as opposed to the view that it's been won over to capitalism by “petty and apparent” privileges. Carolyn (New York LnR) wrote in 1998: “In Brooklyn, where I grew up, there are numerous white working class neighborhoods filled with homeowners right next to Black and Latino neighborhoods filled with people living in public housing projects...every time a Black family saves enough to buy a house in Canarsie, the house is firebombed within the first week.”

What finally plowed LnR under was the quiet middle majority, those of us who failed to save it. The final year's Coordinating Committee never met, flaking out completely, and LnR's Working Groups — meant to be the link between theory and practice, where we'd hash out our movement strategies — never functioned well. In 1997, Justine (Minneapolis LnR) wrote: “It's crazy that Working Groups didn't have time to meet at the last conference. This should have been a priority over...the political statement.” Spending all our energy on the two questions splitting us apart meant we didn't cultivate ideas for strategy that could have brought us together. Most members outside New York decided the ideological debates, and LnR itself, were irrelevant to their movement work.

Jessica, Carolyn and Justine's writings would have enriched New World, but they were left out because — like most of the documents by LnR women — they invoke details of our activism, references to other members' statements and messy specifics. But any generalized theory can sound great on paper — wouldn't you rather hear about how it works out in practice?

After the split, I helped start the Fire by Night Organizing Committee, a tiny multi-tendency group. FbN's long self-criticism of LnR, already published as a pamphlet, has the book's last word — but without the Afterword explaining that FbN dissolved in 2000, acknowledging mistakes it made in New York as an all-white group in a people of color-led movement. Also missing are writings by two members who became Marxist-Leninists that could have either won readers to their ideas or shown that there may actually be a slippery slope to Stalinism.

Five of the 20 pieces are by Chris Day, which seems like a lot. Chris is a committed activist and theoretical thinker — a valuable asset when every revolutionary theory is either outdated or must be defended against the crimes of its true believers. Yet he would have been hated (by the same anarchists who read Malatesta) if he'd put out a book of his own writing. New World is essential reading for anarchists willing to grapple with the questions Chris and others raised, but unwilling to leave anarchism behind just because it hasn't answered those questions yet. You can't join Love and Rage now, but I recommend reading this book and finding your own way to working collectively for revolution.

Former Love and Rage members are currently working on a range of political projects and organizations. Here are some of them:

Bring the Ruckus (name is a work in progress) — www.agitatorindex.org

Freedom Road Socialist Organization/Marxist-Leninist — www.frso.org.

Freedom Road Socialist Organization/Left Refoundationist — www.freedomroad.org

Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists- www.nefac.net

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