

Let's Talk... Mutual Aid

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So, in the time of covid-19, we have seen so many calls to and for “Mutual Aid”. Which is dope, great, awesome, important, but also has led to some confusion (dare I say co-option) as to what mutual is and isn’t. This zine will attempt to explain Mutual Aid in the time of covid-19, and also how Mutual Aid practices must be imposed for continued survivance.

So what is Mutual aid?

Mutual aid is simple, it’s the breaking of the binary of the “Haves and have nots” with the intention to re-allocate for equitable access to resources, education, and needs. Seems simple enough. However, Mutual Aid is also a legacy, and a practice. It is a commitment to anticapitalism. Capitalists cannot practice Mutual Aid; they can practice temporary reallocation (ie philanthropy) which is not the same. **Charity is not Mutual Aid.**

Though charity and temporary reallocation are important aspects that Mutual Aid asks us to include, it is not at the crux of the theory or methodology. Yes, re-allocation is important, but reallocation cannot be temporary. It must be carried into the world beyond times of panic, emergency, or pandemic. Those who were not practicing Mutual Aid previous to covid-19 need to understand that they must commit to providing Mutual Aid BEYOND covid-19. And if y’all can’t make that commitment, then y’all are practicing charity and temporary reallocation of resources; which perpetuates the binary of wealth.

Mutual aid is a LONG TERM commitment to the community.

Mutual aid is based in community control, aiding one another to break free from capitalism and colonial authority. It can look different in different places. And it also demands that we use each other as responsible and meaningful contributions, so it also demands reciprocity and resource exchange (though not immediately or always).

SKILLSHARE

We ask for folx to skill share as part of the practice. But we do not demand of them to contribute if they cannot in the moment, or force any ideologies of “owing” someone or something. You give an apple to a friend, and six months later they show you how to make bread. It wasn’t an immediate share, it was not an expectation, nor a transaction. But rather a skill share in response to your action of giving. Again, it is not necessary, but seeing one another as meaningful and able to share with one another is necessary. Whether all folx can exercise that same reciprocal practice is not necessary, but we should not assume that people do not have things to share.

Skill share is central for the sustainability of Mutual Aid.

You ask for skill share so that you can continue to skill share, and grow a community autonomously, breaking away from the dependence on the settler colonial state. Teach a man to fish mentality, I guess....I don’t love that example, but imagine if you teach a community to fish. You remove the middle-men, actualize sustainability, and give everyone equitable opportunity to learn a skill they can re-share. However, if someone in the community cannot learn to fish, that’s also cool. We will still provide! Accountability to the community is not based on reciprocity, but we must also provide people with the option to contribute. This is how we break ageist, ableist, labor hierarchy. No matter the age, no matter the ability, no matter the education, people can contribute. Try more creative ways to contribute; consider that children and elders are also people within the community that may want to share skills. Yes, their skills may be less labor related, but they are skills nonetheless. People have value beyond labor, beyond capitalist notions of productivity. Spending time with an elder or child is emotional nourishment, it has value and we are obligated to offer the exchange of knowledge cross-generationally and no matter the ability.

We also do not measure things based in equal reciprocity, we do not need to practice payment or profit. In fact, we SHOULD NOT practice profit or payment. **Mutual aid is not done from the kindness of our hearts (though that helps), it is done because we respect people’s autonomous lives and want our communities to thrive.** No one is expected to “pay” for anything, and there will be many unequal knowledge shares that are practiced, AND THAT’S OK. Stop viewing all actions as transactions or as tit for tat. We provide for the greater good and because we can and want to.

Mutual aid is not about productivity or labor as a measurable act. It does not see all people as laborers or even as productive, but asks us to provide the option for everyone to commit to community through consensual contribution. It does advocate for consensual prior and informed community control and cooperative acts. We do not practice “survival of the fittest”, and advocate that all people are fit by different definitions of the term. And if you feel that you are not able to contribute for whatever reason, then the community will provide and skill share with you. **MUTUAL AID IS ABOUT COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE. Community knowledge is community strength; we do not withhold.**

ANARCHO-COMMUNIST CO-OPTION

Many white organizers will have you believe that Mutual Aid is an anarchist-communist theory based in either autonomous independence from the state or workers rights. Though Mutual Aid does encompass those things, it is important that people understand that Mutual Aid has and always will be a non-western tradition. **Mutual Aid is Indigenous lifeways and sovereignty; it is Black thrivance and power, which will outlive anarcho-communist theory.** It is not a theory, it is a practice that most people of color have been practicing and predates colonialism and capitalism. This is important to note, because the co-option of Mutual Aid without accountability is racism. The co-option of Mutual Aid as an anarcho-communist theory participates in the erasure of systems and communities of color that are the authority in Mutual Aid practices. BIPOC mutual aid practices were purposefully destroyed by white settlers through genocide, assimilation, and a commitment to greed via capitalism. We cannot divorce the legacies of trauma that exist due to settler meddling. We will not allow white organizers and anarcho-communist folx to appropriate our teachings in a time of panic.

By committing to Mutual Aid practices, you are demanding accountability for long-term commitment to the upheaval of white supremacy. Mutual aid demands settlers to relinquish control in order for them to contribute at all.

We cannot allow Mutual Aid practices to be co-opted by nonprofits, white organizers, or other “charity” based folx, who are not committed to understanding that Mutual Aid has been a practice by people of color for longer than they could even imagine. **Mutual aid is a unifying term, putting a name to the practice that most of us (BIPOC) folx have been acting on all our lives.** Mutual aid was not born out of survival, its proposed purpose is for communities to THRIVE. Yes, it has been used in times of crises to help the most targeted in our society so that they can survive, but that is not enough. We must be committed to seeing people thrive, not just scrape by.

WHITE SAVIORS AND MUTUAL AID

BE WARY OF WHITE SAVIORS. In times of crisis, people who have access to money, stable jobs and housing (most likely white folx) will offer these under the guise of Mutual Aid. Unless they commit to a long-term Mutual Aid goal beyond crisis, then it is NOT Mutual Aid. It is CHARITY or WHITE SAVIOR COMPLEX. And we must hold them accountable for not exercising Mutual Aid beyond an emergency situation. Use their time, money, capital, and privilege to educate others on how and why Mutual Aid is community commitment. It is easier than just donating to someone's gofundme. It is more than delivering groceries to the elderly once or twice during the covid-19 pandemic. **IT IS A LONG TERM COMMITMENT BASED IN ACTIONABLE RESULTS THAT REMOVES COMMUNITY OUT OF THEIR DEPENDENCY ON THE CAPITALIST SETTLER STATE.**

A lot of yall already practice Mutual Aid. But it is time to do MORE right now considering pandemics trigger folx to hoard as a means of "survival".

Individualism is capitalism is colonialism is white supremacy.

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