

Differences Of Strategy And Organization

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In the beginning, I was happy to see the Bring On The Ruckus (BTR) position paper, as it seemed to be a solid proposal and there are many political similarities I personally share with them. However, in the course of a debate that a few NEFAC members had with them on a list aimed to build a North American Revolutionary Anarchist Federation (NARAF), I realized that we disagree on a number of key points (plus, their approach seems to be one of “all or nothing” so it’s hard to debate with them).

So, I have several problems with the Ruckus proposal and I think there are several important differences between NEFAC and the BTR project.

THERE IS A THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL DIFFERENCE ON THE LEVEL OF ORGANIZATION

The Ruckus Collective wants to build a continental (or US national) federation while we want to build regional federations first. That’s a problem, but only a minor one. Of course, as their politics are really US-centered, I don’t think a continental federation will ever work. However, that is not the main problem; rather, it is BTR arguments for a cadre organization that is much more problematic in my opinion.

For those who don’t know, “the cadre, as a political idea, gained currency and eventually institutional standing in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), during the ascendancy of Lenin at the beginning of this century. It was originally a military term used in the bourgeois armies of the day. It denoted an officer rank with professional and permanent status around which an effective army could be built. Lenin in his characteristically imaginative way borrowed it for use in the “class war”. The aim of the cadre in political change does not differ substantially from its military origins. Essentially that aim is to solidify and expedite organizational growth around a given set of ideas. The cadre is then, by definition, an organizational framework or tool. Secondly, by definition, the cadre always pre-supposes a non-cadre level or, more generously, a cadre-elect.” [Kevin Doyle, WSM]

The problem I see with the idea of the cadre (and to a lesser extent with the idea of the “organizer” put forward by our American comrades) is that it is not libertarian. It might build an efficient organization but it cannot build a libertarian revolution. A libertarian revolution would require an autonomous mass movement able to debate, self-manage itself and develop it’s own politics. This is not what happens with cadre-style organizing.

BTR claims that “the purpose of a revolutionary organization is to act as a cadre group that develops politics and strategies that contribute to mass movements toward a free society”. So, as you see the idea is not to try to develop the autonomy necessary within social movements so that the movements themselves develop their own politics and strategies. There’s a contradiction in the BTR proposal because at the same time they say they don’t want to control the movements and that they want members to be “dedicated to developing its [the movements] autonomous revolutionary potential”. But then, if that’s the case, why say that a “cadre group should debate those politics and strategies that best imagine and lead to a free society and then fight to enact them in mass-oriented organizations and movements”.

My problem is that implicit in this theory is that mass organizations do not have political autonomy and that the average worker is too dumb to develop politics. I say, and it is also the majority position in NEFAC, that the role of the revolutionary organization is to develop

autonomy of social movements rather than think in their place. Of course, we must agitate for our idea and lead the battle of ideas, but as members of the class not as outside agitators. We want people to think for themselves, not to force down their throat our oh-so perfect ideas.

BTR claims that we “need to forge a path between the Leninist vanguard party favored by traditional Marxist parties and the loose “network” model of organizing favored by many anarchists and activists today”. I think we all agree on this. However, while NEFAC has chosen a platformist federation model, BTR has chosen a cadre; they are not the same thing, whether we like it or not.

REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY

While both BTR and NEFAC agree we need a strategy in order to win, the two groups obviously have different revolutionary strategy.

For BTR, “the glue that has kept the American state together has been white supremacy; melting that glue creates revolutionary possibilities” and so “the proposed organization’s priority should be to destroy white supremacy”. To do this, Ruckus argue that “the central task of a new organization should be to break up this unholy alliance between the ruling class and the white working class by attacking the system of white privilege and the subordination of people of color”.

On the other hand, NEFAC believes that the central feature of Canada and the United States is not so much that they are racist or settler societies (which they are), but that they are class societies. We also think that the only ones who have the power to change society and build a libertarian society are the workers. The central aim of our strategy is to build a class force. While we agree that white supremacy is one of the central obstacles to building such a class force, we don’t think it is the only one (not even the main one in the case of Quebec). We think we must confront all of the obstacles head-on and build a class alliance on the basis of the needs and interests of the most exploited sectors (which obviously includes people of color in the US). Instead of focusing on racism or sexism (or any other ‘ism’) we would argue that the struggles with the most subversive potential are those where oppression meet and where people coming from different backgrounds end up having the same interests. That’s why we focus on housing, gentrification, poverty and workplace struggles.

We already had this debate with BTR, those that want to see the end result on our side can read “Where Do We Go Now? Towards a Fresh Revolutionary Strategy” [see NEA #3]

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