Response to Multi-Racial Organization Editorial

Joel Olson

1997

The editorial "Building a Multi-Racial/Multi-National Revolutionary Anarchist Organization" in the June/July *Love and Rage*, and the defense of it in the August/September *Love and Rage* by eight New York Love and Rage members may give readers the impression that the Love and Rage Federation has a unified position on questions of race and activism and that the editorial accurately expresses that opinion. This is not the case. The editorial unfortunately presents only one perspective within the Federation, a perspective that I, as a long-time member of Love and Rage, believe is fundamentally wrong.

The editorial suffers from three crucial political errors, First, it has the relationship between fighting white supremacy and building a multi-racial organization backwards. Second, the publication of the editorial was undemocratic because it was published without significant debate by the membership. Finally, the politics expressed in the editorial lead us away from revolutionary action.

The editorial attempts to address several important questions that all revolutionaries must answer: how can we overcome the problem of a working class disastrously divided by the tragic history of white supremacy? What is the appropriate role of mostly-white revolutionary organizations in relating to communities and revolutionaries of color (who aren't already members of these organizations)? How should a mostly-white revolutionary organization proceed if it is to smash its whiteness and effectively tremble the pillars that prop up this evil system? Unfortunately, the solution the editorial provides for these questions — build a multi-racial organization — is a disastrous one. It is disastrous because, despite its good intentions, it objectively promotes a policy of white vanguardism. In making a call for people of color to join Love and Rage, the editorial essentially calls for a tiny, mostly-white organization to provide leadership for communities of color, particularly the Black community. This is vanguardism, which as anarchists we should absolutely avoid. We shouldn't be scrambling to put together a multi-racial organization to fight white supremacy but rather doing the reverse: struggling relentlessly and unceasingly against white skin privilege. Once we have proven ourselves as serious opponents of white privilege, we make it possible for Love and Rage to eventually become thoroughly multi-racial.

I also disagree that the reason Love and Rage is currently a mostly-white organization is because of "cultural reasons." Look at the rest of the American left: is it disproportionately white

for "cultural reasons," too? Obviously not, but if other left groups have political problems that explain their general whiteness, how have we managed to avoid such errors while still remaining largely white? I agree that Love and Rage's political and social culture is not that comfortable for many people of color (nor for some of its present members!), but claiming that culture is the main obstacle preventing us from becoming multi-racial is a weak attempt to avoid the responsibility of examining the political principles that help keep us majority-white.

At this point in our history, it is not our job to meddle in the business of communities of color. Now, this could change. Love and Rage may grow to become a group with a significant Black, Latino, Asian, and/or Native American membership. If this happens, then we can democratically decide, as a group, whether and when to begin taking positions on affairs concerning communities of color. But this is my second criticism of the editorial: if we're going to involve ourselves in issues that belong to communities of color (because we are or want to become a multi-racial group), we need to decide this democratically, after a full and free debate among all the membership. This has never happened yet. Thus, the position the "Building" editorial takes is undemocratic because it takes a position that the Love and Rage membership has not significantly debated nor voted on.

As a former member of Love and Rage's coordinating committee, I know how hard it is for a directly democratic organization to publish editorials. They have to reflect the politics of an organization whose principles and positions are still being developed and whose members are a pack of stubborn sonofaguns. I don't expect all members to proofread every editorial before it goes to print, but I do expect there to be prior federation-wide political discussion on issues before we put something in print, and that positions taken in editorials are unquestionably majority positions within the organization. I also expect our editorials to reflect our debates, including noting dissenting opinions when they exist.

Finally, I worry that the politics of the editorial, should they become the standard within Love and Rage, will lead us way from our commitment to revolution. As an organization of revolutionaries, the main point of our collective activism should be to develop and encourage campaigns and actions that work toward the building of a dual power. A dual power means that our strategies, tactics, and programs must directly challenge the existing institutions of power in this world and in some way prefigure the new society we want to build. I believe that any campaign or working group Love and Rage builds should be based on a dual power strategy, and that if a campaign or working group isn't, it should either be modified so that it is, or abandoned for another project. Strategies that are not based on dual power may achieve important social reforms, such as welfare reform, the establishment of civilian review boards for police, etc., but they don't threaten the system itself. As revolutionaries, we want to win reforms, of course, but not when they strengthen the hand of the state. We have to resist liberalism and the state at every moment and treat them as enemies just as much as the right.

I'm afraid that spending our time "building a multi-racial organization" rather than smashing the institutions that prop this evil system up — -particularly the white race — will only continue our tendency to avoid the task of coming up with dual power strategies. In what ways do our three present working groups (anti-austerity, anti-fascist, anti-police) work to build a dual power? Do they work to abolish white skin privilege, or threaten the patriarchal family, or seek to disrupt other such institutions which are so crucial to the maintenance of this system? Or is their goal to make Love and Rage "multi-racial" through struggle and the winning of reforms?

I believe Love and Rage needs to reject the politics of the "Building" editorial and replace them with the following principles:

1. One of the key tasks of Love and Rage is to smash white power and white privilege wherever it appears, particularly in "normal" society.

2. A multiracial organization is a product of uncompromising struggle against white supremacy and white skin privilege — in society and within the organization — not the prerequisite of such struggle.

3. As an organization that is largely white and living in a white-supremacist society, we often unintentionally reproduce white power even as we fight against it. Therefore, Love and Rage must recognize that, at this time at least, our task is to abolish the white race and not to provide leadership for Black people or other communities of color.

The "Building" editorial, as far as I can tell, represents the politics of several comrades in Love and Rage. Probably others agree, but I have no way of knowing that. I hope and believe that many others disagree. I do know that the politics expressed in that editorial do not represent my views, and I urge the Federation, after a free and lively debate, to elect to print a retraction of "Building" in a future issue of the newspaper and to commit ourselves to grounding our activism in strategies of dual power.

In solidarity,
Joel Olson
Phoenix

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Joel Olson
Response to Multi-Racial Organization Editorial
1997

From *A New World in Our Hearts: Eight Years of Writings from the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation* edited by Roy San Filippo.
Published in *Love and Rage,* November/December 1997. This is a response to Building a Multi-Racial/Multi-National Revolutionary Anarchist Organization.

theanarchistlibrary.org