

The Future of “Revolutionary Work In Our Times” (RWIOT)

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For 3 years now, revolutionary activists from social movements and explicitly revolutionary organizations have been building the Revolutionary Work in Our Times (RWIOT) project. The core organizations—Freedom Road Socialist Organization/ Organización Socialista del Camino para la Libertad, League of Revolutionaries for a New America, Left Turn, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, the New York Study Group, and Solidarity—and unaffiliated activists participating in RWIOT share commitments to cross-sector and cross-tendency dialogue, an intersectional approach to understanding and fighting oppressions, and a non-vanguardist attitude to the question of revolutionary organization in the 21st century.

The first US Social Forum in August 2007 in Atlanta provided the opportunity for a new national dialogue and the formation of RWIOT. Community and social movement activists had formed study groups and collectives in various cities to pose the question of broader and more explicitly revolutionary organization. They joined with members of established revolutionary organizations who had rejected dogmatic vanguardist “party models” of organization in favor of a more open, flexible politics and a commitment to building movements of social resistance for their own sake.

The extended workshop at the USSF on revolutionary strategy for the 21st Century drew over 150 participants, most of whom were not of the “old left” and including many of the young, queer and people of color activists who are often marginalized by the established US left. This experience was the inspiration for a bigger RWIOT gathering the following year.

Over 200 activists participated in a 4-day RWIOT conference in New Brunswick, NJ in the summer of 2008. This event explored the history of revolutionary movements and organization and took stock of the state of resistance in communities and workplaces in the US and internationally. Local forums and report-backs that fall attracted even more activists.

This summer, RWIOT organized a weekend-long event, attended by 230 people, in Chicago. Billed as a “strategic dialogue” it represented an attempt to discuss the current state of the left in the USA and revolutionary perspectives after Obama’s election—once again including a range of traditions and viewpoints on the revolutionary left in the USA.

Hundreds of activists have connected in one way or another with RWIOT—from serving on planning bodies or organizing sessions at the RWIOT events to attending national or local RWIOT gatherings. Local follow-up sessions, fundraisers and report-backs have been held in some cities, but RWIOT has been organized mostly around these annual national gatherings.

RWIOT’s strongest achievement to date is the organization of these gatherings as spaces of dialogue across sectors, traditions and generations. At each of the RWIOT events there has been a conscious, and reasonably successful, commitment to prioritize the participation and politics of women, people

of color, and LGBTQ activists.

The level of debate on revolutionary strategy is not yet very deep, and many of us share concern over the composition and character of RWIOT events. Yet, it is still a substantial achievement to have simply put common questions on the table for hundreds of activists and bring together both those seeking a new, more radical political affiliation but not yet in a cadre organization and members of revolutionary organizations who yearn for a bigger, more vibrant revolutionary project in the US today. “Unaffiliated” activists are engaged in discussions about revolutionary ideas and organizational strategies that can help place sometimes isolated struggles in the bigger picture. Members of revolutionary organizations learn about struggles on the ground and in communities they may not yet be involved in, and are challenged to commit to real struggle alongside activists and movements that the established left has, for the most part, not engaged.

Moving Forward

We believe there is more potential for RWIOT than we have so far been able to realize. In the near term, it is possible for us to attract more activists to it and deepen the “strategic” part of the dialogues. Most important, however, we believe that this project must fully engage activists who are not affiliated to the core organizations in a way that has not happened so far. If RWIOT is to grow, the most important step will be engaging the imagination of those who want a better and less sectarian alternative revolutionary organization in the USA today. Without such a clear and overarching orientation, the unaffiliated radicals, who are largely responsible for the actual success of RWIOT events, will lose interest and drop away.

Thus, we offer the following suggestions to our fellow core organizations and activists in the RWIOT project:

*** Establish RWIOT as a revolutionary network** - The organized initiative of the hundreds of activists who’ve attended RWIOT gatherings or who remain interested in it would propel the process and deepen its foundation in social movement revolutionary activists.

This means opening up the network to those who share the core principles of RWIOT. We should enforce general guidelines to guarantee the overall anti-capitalist political outlook, non-sectarian and demographic character of the revolutionary organization we want to see ourselves in. Such an approach does not mean fusion of the core organizations—these would remain independent organizational sponsors of RWIOT.

We could apply a process similar to that used to admit applicants to the national gatherings—prioritizing membership of women, people of color, LGBTQ and low-income activists—to accept members into the network.

The establishment of a network that organizations and individuals can belong to, take ownership of and responsibility for, and make decisions within is a crucial step to harnessing the ideas and energy of all who are committed to RWIOT as a contribution to left unity.

*** Democratic forum for decision making** - Looking back on the Chicago ‘Strategic Dialogue’ in particular, we feel that the RWIOT process and its events need to provide far more room for collective, democratic decision-making amongst all participating activists. Local and national conferences should be organized to give full rights to the assembled participants to develop and share proposals and make decisions on next steps.

This means allowing for and actively developing representation on the leadership committee of

unaffiliated activists, alongside representatives from the core organizations. This more open, democratic method is needed to strengthen RWIOT's capacity, improve its demographic composition and lessen the organization burden on core organizations and 'Mojo' (Planning Committee) members.

*** Clarity on Goals and Commitments from Core Organizations** - The core organizations do not have consensus on how to go forward or a shared perspective on what RWIOT should become. This lack of consensus and undeveloped discussion of next steps and the character of RWIOT lead to confusion, uneven allocation of political and material resources, and lack of clarity amongst all participants as to just what they're participating in.

RWIOT core organizations and the planning committee should devote more discussion to the goals of the whole project (beyond goals for each national gathering) and to what our organizations are willing to commit to and give up in order to achieve those goals.

*** 2010 U.S. Social Forum** - RWIOT's core groups are planning to profile the RWIOT project at the US Social Forum in Detroit next summer. In the lead up to bringing our perspectives into the broader dialogue of the Social Forum, we should strive to strengthen RWIOT's definition and broaden participation at its core. With a more coherent basis established, as an activist network of revolutionaries, RWIOT can make a significant contribution to modeling what a future refounded revolutionary left might look like.