

# Platform

Rochester Red and Black

Sept. 2011

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## **Capitalism**

Fundamentally, we oppose capitalism and all forms of exploitation. Capitalism is an imposed socially constructed system, not a product of human nature. It is founded on exploitation, which extracts profits from the labor of the workers. This creates an uneven class system, where lower classes continue to be the source of profit for those on top. Through this an entire matrix of inequality is initiated, creating divisions and hierarchies between people based on race, sex, gender orientation, and an array of other elements of identity. These inequalities are inherent to capitalism's drive to create competition between people rather than cooperation, and therefore perpetuate inequality. Capitalism drives all elements of social and natural life into a form of commodity: resources, nature, individuals and even the basic experiences of life. In an economic sense, capitalism's brutal class system requires institutionalized poverty at the bottom. This is perpetuated with a series of myths, such as the idea that capitalism is a natural form of human evolution and the concept of the necessary nature of meritocracy, which says that the wealth people own comes from their own merit.

## **The State**

Class society requires a mechanism to protect the interests of the minority that control wealth and power. That mechanism is the state. The state is not a neutral instrument that the working class can take control of for its own interest. The state holds a monopoly on "legitimate" violence within society, meant to ensure "order" despite injustice and inequality. Whether dictatorships, "representational democracies", or state communism, all states act as defenders of that inequality. When American capitalists have interests that extend beyond the US borders, the state creates the illusion of a national interest to create the legitimacy necessary to wage war. These wars are clearly in service of the interests of the capitalist class and are ultimately not in the interest of the working classes of either land. The tool by which the state maintains its control either at home or abroad is coercion.

In an effort to preserve their legitimacy, and as a result of class struggle, some states maintain programs with important positive social impact like Social Security and Medicare. These programs are ultimately unsustainable, as they are counter to the interests of the capitalists that the state actually represents. Therefore these programs are distorted and weakened over time to ensure that business interests are satisfied. To organize a revolutionary society, we must have popular and democratic institutions that replace the positive functions of the state. We believe in community self-management of society and the economy rather than state and capitalist control.

## **Anarchist Communism**

In place of the present capitalist system we seek to establish a society of free producers, where the now-oppressed masses make all the fundamental decisions of social life directly through organizations of their own choice with which they identify themselves completely and can exert control. This means a society run through popular, democratic institutions, where all are able to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. A free society, we contend, can only be based on the notion of "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their need,"

since only under conditions of social and economic equality can freedom – real freedom – truly develop. Likewise, a society based on the ideas of liberty, equality and solidarity is the only social arrangement where both the individual and collective elements of society can be recognized and cherished without one subsuming the other- where all human potential that is restrained by the present economic and social order can be allowed to flourish. Such a society we call Anarchist Communism.

## Class Struggle

While we hope for a future where all of humanity is united and working towards common goals of justice and fulfillment for all, we recognize that there are currently many barriers to that future. Humanity is not one big happy family. We are divided primarily into two conflicting classes, a working class that survives by selling its time and labor, and a capitalist class that profits from the exploitation of the working class. While a parasitic capitalist class lives in luxury through its exploitation of the masses of people, a unified humanity remains impossible.

In the process of building a class that can only survive through selling its time and labor, capitalism locks some people out of the work force. Some are held in near permanent unemployment and others, like housewives, help to contribute to society's wealth but aren't paid for it. Others, like farm workers in the United States, are not considered workers legally. This is absurd, since the industrial and business nature of agriculture today makes farm workers – just like housewives and the unemployed – an integral part of the working class.

Not everyone who is in a class knows that they are in the class. There is frequently a difference between the class that people perceive themselves to be in and the class that they actually are in objectively. In the United States, huge numbers of people believe themselves to be part of the middle class. In terms of the relationship that they hold to power and wealth, these same people are almost always a part of the working class, but for a variety of reasons have begun to identify as a “middle class” that sees itself as separate from the working class. When we choose to identify as separate classes, we ultimately weaken the ability of the broad working class to resist the deterioration of their standard of living.

Different sectors of the working class are made to believe that their interests are contrary to each other. Nothing can be further from the truth. When one sector of workers faces a loss, a ripple effect will ultimately impact others as the standard of living that the capitalist class is expected to provide the working class declines. This is also true when workers win. If wages and benefits in one sector rise, other businesses are forced to raise their wages and benefits to compete and attract workers.

We organize to build working class unity through struggle and build a united working class movement for the abolition of classes altogether. Because the working class creates all wealth in the world, they not only have a right to that wealth, but also have the power to stop the production of all wealth in the world. This ultimately means that the working class has the power to rid itself of the ruling class which survives on the profits created by the working class.

In the short term, this means that the working class has the power through direct action and class struggle to create immediate change. In a struggle for universal health care, there is great power in an organized body of health care workers refusing to deny services. In a struggle against the privatization of public utilities, there is great power in organized utility workers refusing to

turn off people's power. In the struggle against war, there is great power in dock workers refusing to ship arms. Ultimately it is within the grasp of the unified working class to bring the capitalist system of inequality and exploitation to a grinding halt through mass class struggle.

## **Role of the Anarchist Organization**

In spite of its commitment to revolutionary values, anarchism has often played only a minor role in the history of revolutions worldwide. Its internal disconnection and lack of coordination have reduced its impact. To remedy this situation, we seek to create an anarchist organization that can bring local anarchists together to develop our ideas and theories which can then be brought back into the social movements of which we are a part. It is these social movements, not the anarchist organization, which are the revolutionary actors. The role of the anarchist organization is to draw from the ideas and experiences gained from those social movements and to offer our own ideas to them. We reject Leninist vanguardism and the idea of attempting to capture the leadership of social movements in order to force our beliefs on those involved. Where social movements do not exist, the role of organized anarchists should be to catalyze them and attempt to move them in a more radical militant direction.

## **Direct Action**

Direct action simply means to act directly for yourself rather than having an intermediate perform the task for you, such as in the representative state. This will ultimately mean the expropriation of the current capitalist forms of property and government, and restructuring and redistributing resources based on the direct decision making of the people. In the present moment, direct action can take the form of boycotting, civil disobedience, disruption of ecological destruction, eviction blockades, university or workplace occupations and active resistance to unjust policy. We believe that direct action is the most potent force for social change as it bypasses institutional barriers and allows participants to take active control over their lives and communities, which genuinely empowers people and foreshadows the way in which a positive society will function. In this way we are opposed to electoral politics in principle as they maintain convention and class domination and do not inhabit the spirit of direct democracy.

Our position on direct action does not mean that we will not take on other tactics, or be accountable to other groups with whom we are working, but it does mean that we believe direct action is the most effective form of action and fundamental to the transformation of society and those involved.

## **Patriarchy and Queer Liberation**

We reject patriarchy: the system of male domination, heteronormity, and gender oppression. Through our rejection of patriarchy we also reject the gender binary as well as any biological or social basis for sexism. We intend to fight sexism both when it takes economic and non-economic form, such as through familial roles, rape culture, and unwaged labor such as childcare. Systems of hierarchy reinforced through capitalism and the state make gender liberation impossible, and therefore we see issues of patriarchy as taking part in a larger system of socio-economic oppres-

sion. Both institutions require strict adherence to prescribed roles and inequality within those roles, and they include set gender, sexual, and behavioral norms.

Through this we challenge heteronormity and the assumption of standardized expressions of sexuality and gender, and support the free development of people's identity and relationships. Both queer and women's oppression are part of the same system of male dominance, and as such we oppose the oppression of queer and transsexual people.

## **Anti-Racism**

We know that race is a biological fiction for which there is no scientific basis, but that racist oppression is a social reality. American racism is not just made up of racist attitudes of individuals, but also of massive systemic and institutional forces that reinforce and reproduce the oppression of workers of color.

We know that white privilege is real and that it benefits so-called white workers relative to workers of color in ways both big and small, but because these privileges divide white workers against workers of color (critically damaging the ability of the whole working class to struggle for justice) it is contrary to the interest of white workers to defend these privileges and in the interest of the entire working class to dismantle them.

We believe that in order to fight for justice and win revolution the working class must be truly united. In order to really unite and not just brush aside the issues that divide the large and multiracial working class, it is crucial that we build deep and genuine anti-racism within the class. We also believe that the single best way to do this is to grow real solidarity over the course of common struggle. We utterly reject the idea that people are inherently racist, and we believe that just as racism is socially learned, it can be socially unlearned. Within our organizations, we should be actively working to break down the barriers that racism has created.

As anarchists, we encourage all people to fight their oppression in ways they think best, but we also specifically seek to build multiracial mass movements of the working class because we think that only such movements are truly capable of winning. We reject the idea that racism can be destroyed by a cross-class alliance of all people of color. Racism can best be smashed by an anti-racist working class revolution.

## **Ability, Disability and Ableism**

We oppose hierarchies and judgments of human worth based upon differences in physical or mental ability, structure or functioning. We reject the idea of a single "ideal" type of human, and oppose and condemn the ideas of eugenics and social Darwinism. Everyone has the right to be accepted and understood on their own terms, and should not have to live with the labels imposed externally by others.

As capitalism only values those who can help create a profit, those who cannot help make a profit due to physical or mental differences often are stigmatized, locked out of the workforce, impoverished, denied care and made homeless. We seek an Anarchist-Communist society where everyone is fully materially supported and free to contribute to society in their own way.

In relation to mental ability, we support the idea of mental diversity, and strongly suspect that many individuals diagnosed with "mental illnesses" are simply labeled such because an author-

itarian society is unable to tolerate diversity. However, we also recognize that many of these differences can clearly cause significant impairment of life functioning and are experienced as illness, and we support full availability of mental health services (including early childhood intervention) free of charge. These services should be able to be provided without causing fear of stigma, which stems from the implicit hierarchical models of ability and disability embedded in our culture. To the extent that individuals or groups feel that the labels implicit in mental health treatment are dehumanizing, disempowering, and disrespectful of their autonomy, then the mental health profession serves as an instrument of social control rather than as healing. We seek a society in which those with special needs are cared for in a manner which respects their dignity.

As “disability” and “ability” are often designations which can change depending on social context, we strive to make Rochester Red and Black and the other organizations with which we work maximally accessible for all people. We work to avoid ableist language which privileges those with certain kinds of health and ability by implicitly putting down those who are different.

## **Nationalism**

We oppose all forms of nationalism, which we define as movements based on a common identity advocating separatism, supremacy, or the formation of a nation or nation-state that enforces that identity on the population. This can take the form of ethnic, religious, or cultural separatism, whether used in terms of modern governmental bodies or alternative groupings of peoples. We do support the necessity of the full expression of the multiplicity of cultural identity, and believe that this richness is inherent to diversity internationally. We do not support national liberation movements that identify with the nation state or employ class collaboration, but instead support self-determination for oppressed peoples, the defeat of imperialism, freedom from oppression for people on occupied lands, and solidarity between the international working class. Through this we support the elimination of all political borders, amnesty for “illegal” peoples residing in countries that do not recognize their legal status, and an internationalist tendency that sees the importance for working class unity across the globe without divisions based on national identity.

## **Ecology**

Our view on the environment is biocentrism: the idea that our natural world is more than just itemized resource extraction and that it has the right and necessity to exist on its own. Humanity should not attempt to dominate the environment, as the industrial capitalist mode of production dictates, and it is not simply for our utility. Capitalism alienates us from the natural world and how our institutions are actively destroying it. This remains a crisis of capitalism, where its principles of perpetual growth cannot be in line with sustainability and a connection to the Earth. Just as with poverty and war, capitalism requires environmental devastation to function. Within this system of environmental attack, working class populations, indigenous groups, and people of color experience a greater immediate impact from this catastrophe because of their forced marginalization. We understand that social transformation is crucial for moving toward a true ecological balance, and this cannot be regulated purely toward any type of lifestyle changes, technological innovation, or broad attacks on technology.

## **Federalism**

We are committed to the organizational principles of federalism in that we support the free association of individuals and organizations, as well as the balance between autonomy and unity. This freedom to associate between individuals and groups will also mean the freedom to disassociate at will, allowing communities and organizations to understand their own needs and meet these according to their own character. This is different than organizations that use centralism, where a centralized groups dictates for a range of regional organization ideology and practices. We see this as unable to meet the needs of the community or represent the diversity that those communities may hold, and therefore centralism takes on authoritarian modes that we identify with statist politics. Instead we support direct democracy and decentralism in an effort to keep people as directly involved in the decision making process both in the organization and the larger socio-political landscape. Through this we work with other groups and federations through commonalities, yet reserve our own distinctive group dynamic.



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Basic position paper of Rochester Red and Black — produced by them as a group.

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