

The
Pablo Barbaranegra Reader



**In Commemoration of our friend and comrade,
Pablo Barbaranegra, 1983-2018**



Que En Poder Descanse

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Pablo Barbaranegra: A Biography

Pablo “Barbanegra” Avendaño was born on October 1st, 1983 and raised in a working class family, his parents having immigrated from Argentina before his birth. He was the oldest of four brothers and grew up in Southwest Miami, colloquially known “La Sagüesera.” Pablo graduated from G. Holmes Braddock High School where he developed and engaged his interests in reading, politics, sleeping (developing the nickname “the Bear/Oso”), partying with friends as well as listening to and making music (rock and hip hop primarily) and was part of a hip hop group called Soul where he wrote politically themed and socially conscious lyrics.

Pablo attended and graduated from Florida International University (FIU) in Miami with a bachelor’s degree in Political Science. Here he began his involvement in political activism, as one of the founding members of the FIU chapter of United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS). Alongside other student organizers, he engaged in solidarity work with employees at the University of Miami in collaboration with Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Pablo also worked to organize with campus custodial workers who ended up unionizing with American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). During this time he also supported efforts to organize mobile home parks in collaboration with South Florida Jobs with Justice.

During his last years in college and following his graduation, Pablo was a core organizer of the Miami Anarchist and Radical Study Group (MARS) in 2007-2008. That year he was part of the discussions in the Fall of 2008, leading to the founding of Miami Autonomy and Solidarity (MAS) - a libertarian communist, and later explicitly anarchist communist political organization in May of 2009.



Iconic photo of Pablo during the 2015 Baltimore uprising by Devin Allen / IG: bydvnln

After working in the non-profit sector briefly, Pablo transitioned in 2010 to becoming a history teacher in Miami Dade County Public Schools, working at the very high school he graduated from (Braddock). There he became involved in workplace organizing, participating with a network of rank & file teacher activists that worked both within and outside of the official union, United Teachers of Dade. As a teacher, Pablo often went above and beyond to create a curriculum infused with critical pedagogy and radical history which was not easy as a new teacher. The demands he put on himself and resulting sleep deprivation led him at one point to fall asleep at the wheel while driving home. Luckily he was not seriously injured but this led him to transition to South Dade High School and move with his girlfriend from her parents house in Miami Gardens to Homestead the following year.

Through MAS and the workplace network that he developed, he promoted and participated in a county-wide autonomous educator “sick-out” in 2010 that contributed to Governor Charlie Crist vetoing the reactionary education bill that

Florida's congress had passed. However, due to overwork and burnout as a new teacher taking on Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes, he ended up leaving his job as a teacher at the end of his third year.

Outside of his work and workplace organizing, Pablo engaged in writing (some of which is featured here in this reader) and organized, facilitated and presented at film showings, community presentations and workshops on various social justice and radical topics, including a presentation out of town at the 2012 Los Angeles Anarchist Bookfair. He also worked with students at his former college, FIU, engaging with them in student organizing trainings, leading some to participate in developing FIUs "Florida Student Union."

With the emergence of the Occupy movement in 2011, Pablo became heavily engaged in Occupy Miami in collaboration with his political organization, MAS, as well as alongside friends and comrades. He helped to organize the logistics surrounding and personally led the opening general assembly of Occupy Miami as they set up the encampment at Government Center. Pablo also continued organizing with contacts in Occupy Miami to argue for a focus on activity in participants' workplaces, communities and schools. On the national level Pablo played a key role in the "Build Power, Show Power" campaign which attempted to leverage the momentum of occupy to promote workplace and community organizing and call for a May 1st general strike in 2012.



Through MAS, Pablo contributed to a year long process which led to the merger of several groups into what became known as Black Rose/Rosa Negra (BRRN) Anarchist Federation.

In 2013, after leaving his work in Miami-Dade County Public School, Pablo decided to relocate to Philadelphia where his brothers, mother and family had already relocated. He moved in with his family in South Philadelphia while he transitioned to the city. Pablo worked as a bar back and at a local gym before moving on to his work as a bike courier. His younger brother Bryan had worked for years as a translator within the Philadelphia court system and otherwise. For years Pablo discussed getting his certifications for this trade.

Politically, Pablo remained involved at a distance from Philadelphia with the Miami BRRN local while he also became involved in anti-police organizing through the Trayvon Martin Organizing Committee (TMOC). Though later Pablo stepped away from BRRN - as the distance made his work in the Miami local difficult and due to disputes with members from the New York City local - Pablo continued his political study, organizing and activism within Philadelphia. Just before his death he had joined and became involved with Philly Socialists engaging in various community organizing, such as their ESL classes program, but while maintaining his ideological affinity for anarchist communist politics.

On the evening of May 12th, 2018 - the day before Mother's Day - Pablo accepted a bike courier gig that would offer extra money for working in inclement weather at night, app based food delivery service Caviar. In the darkness and rain of that night his tire became lodged in a storm drain leading to the fatal accident which took his life. Pablo was 34 years old. He was full of life and love. He influenced and deeply touched the lives of so many. His many close friends, comrades, family members and loved ones will forever miss him, but carry him with them as they were all deeply influenced by his beautiful heart, mind and life.

We hope that you enjoy this reader of some of his political writings that only touches the tip of the iceberg of his work and ideas that those who knew him were lucky enough to experience and learn from. To honor his life -- taken too soon -- we ask you to consider how to live your life as truly as he did, driven from the deepest faith in and connections to a

heart full of love and ideals of freedom, equality, solidarity and liberation.

- *Friends of Barbanegra, July 22nd, 2018*



Street memorial in honor of Pablo at the site of his passing.

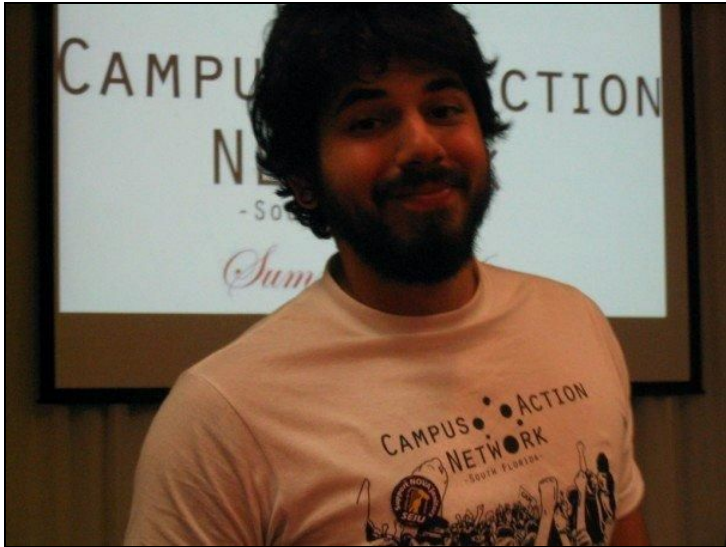


Now More Than Ever: Lessons for Rebuilding the Student Movement in the U.S. Today

Some of Pablo's earliest political work was his student organizing at Florida International University where he was a founding member of the FIU chapter of United Students Against Sweatshops. In this reflective piece in 2010, he discusses some of the lessons and insights that he drew from his experience in student organizing and labor solidarity campaigns. Pablo argues that for an effective student movement to grow there needs to be comprehensive organizing training for students, attention to the sustainability and longevity of student organizations and a focus on organizing students on issues that are directly affecting students as students. This reflection was published on the Miami Autonomy and Solidarity blog on January 13, 2010.

As I seriously consider the prospect of seeking economic asylum from the “Great Recession” in the university, I find myself ruminating more frequently on my experience as a student organizer. The group I helped found at my university, a chapter of United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), is no longer there; even though I only graduated two years ago. It has vanished without a trace; the only sign alerting to our short-lived existence is an infrequently updated student organization website that still list’s our student group’s name as an active organization. It doesn’t come as a surprise to me that the group fell apart after the graduation of a few core members. Despite learning many important lessons near

the end of my time as a student organizer, their late implementation greatly hindered our chances of success; as such I think our demise as a group was inevitable. This is a fate suffered by many student organizations in the U.S. The student organizing landscaped is littered with the corpses of militant sounding acronyms, cancelled domain names, and list serves that were deleted due to inactivity. Yet, this dump site could be rehabilitated, and there are plenty of good reasons as to why it must be. In the following analysis I intend to discuss my own experience and trajectory as a student organizer, lay out what I think are the most important lessons, and outline what I believe students need to be doing in order to build a powerful and combative student movement.



My early attempts at organizing on campus were a resounding failure. The first two organizations I helped to create were greatly hindered by our complete unfamiliarity with any basic rules of organizing. We figured we would simply find an issue (or several), produce a flyer or fact-sheet, and go do some activity around it. With our membership in the single-digits, our tiny groups had to rely on spectacular actions to make our point. While most of us found these activities entertaining and militant (for Miami standards), the militancy did not translate into greater power or influence amongst the student body. If anything, it probably served to alienate us further from them. At this point, I would say that these groups' activities largely remained within the realm of awareness raising, and while this is a critical

part of any groups strategy, it can't encompass the entirety of your group's work. The truth is that many groups never go beyond this stage because they lack basic student organizing skills. Awareness raising can usually be done with very few people, and because many political student groups tend to be small this is something that is usually within their capacity as an organization. Both of these groups soon collapsed after a semester or two, and I was left both physically and emotionally drained.

I soon learned that this is called "activist burnout", or simply "burnout". I was burned out in large part because as one of the more committed and knowledgeable student activist I was constantly taking on more work, often filling in the gaps in our groups. We had no systematic way of teaching or passing on skills in our group, whoever knew how to do something did it. If you knew how to do a lot of things and other in your group didn't, then that usually meant that you would be doing more and more work in order to get things done. As you can imagine, this is extremely inefficient. So, being burnt out led to me pulling myself away from student activism. Yet, in a few months time, a seminal event would take place at the University of Miami (UM). The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) had been organizing UNICCO employees, and many of the janitors and students had gone on hunger strike. At the time I was taking a Labor Studies course and my professor was involved with the struggle at UM. He actually had a union organizer come to our school to speak to us about what was happening at UM. Since this was the only significant labor action in Miami since the FTAA protest, I was really excited to learn more about it and get involved. Going to UM to take part in this fight got me energized about trying to bring this fight to my school, Florida International University. I met a lot of people at the UM hunger strike, and one of them, an employee at South Florida Jobs with Justice (SFIJwJ) encouraged me to start a chapter of USAS at my campus. At first I had some doubts about just starting a chapter of some already existing organization, but eventually decided to go ahead with it after consulting with some friends, and agreeing on the perceived benefits of tapping into an already existing network with a recognizable name.

It wasn't long after starting our group that an SEIU organizer got in touch with us and informed us about the organizing they had been doing with our janitors. They asked for our help, which we were pretty glad to offer, and sent two of our

members to get trained at the USAS summer conference that year. We learned a lot about USAS and what other chapter were doing, but really did not receive any sort of systematic, in-depth training on how to organize on campus. When we returned, we got busy trying to build up our group so that we could be of use to the janitors organizing on campus. We really had no idea of how we were going to do this though. We knew nothing about developing a strategy, selecting appropriate tactics, building up our membership, or setting ourselves up for our next fight or goal. We basically did what the union asked us to do. The fight at our school would not see us engaging in hunger strikes or building occupations, much to our displeasure. Instead our school administrators would call the SEIU's bluff and take the employees in-house, granting the janitors union membership in a relatively weak AFSCME local, and getting the SEIU of its back. The janitors got pay raises, union membership, and a whole host of other benefits. In turn, we were back at square one. We had barely established relations with the janitors, and had no real way of fighting back if the school decided to renege on some of its concessions or not rehire some of the more militant workers. This was not a good position to be in.

Yet, these concerns soon took a backseat to a new organizing prospect being offered by SFIJwJ. With all the recent student organizing happening in Miami, they felt it might be a good idea if student activist started making more formal links with each other. The small size of the Left in South Florida, and the geographical isolation of many of the campuses can prove to be a somewhat desolate environment for student organizers. Three student organizers spent the summer getting some training and laying the groundwork for this emerging network. The network came together pretty quickly, and a well attended student activist conference was organized for that Fall, but our rapid success would soon prove to be our undoing. At the conference, the already visible tensions between different political tendencies within the burgeoning student network came to a head. With no real experience and theoretical knowledge of how to deal with these differences, the group slowly deteriorated, until one week people just stopped showing up to the meetings. It was a painful realization, but one whose lessons would not go unheeded.

As a last ditch effort to save the student activist network, SFIJwJ and the SEIU helped us raise money for a genuine student organizing training. This was perhaps the most important and valuable gift either of these groups could have given us. Whatever their reasons may have been for offering this to us, the intensive, three day Grassroots Organizing Weekend (GROW) training illuminated so many things about student organizing. I describe this as an epiphanic or "ah-ha" moment, so much so that I began qualifying my student organizing experience as Before GROW (BG) and After GROW (AG). It wasn't so much that the training itself was some kind of panacea, but more like a large flood light that had been turned on in a relatively dark area. It helped us to demystify a lot of the work that goes into student organizing, and in turn got us thinking more strategically about organizing. Despite the usefulness of the training, it was too late for our student activist network. Yet, the training made us realize that many of errors we had made were due to our overall lack of general student organizing know-how.

It's often said that there is an easy way to learning something and a hard way. When it comes to student organizing, the work may be difficult but it doesn't mean the lessons learned need to be. Of course, it's hard to know which lessons you should be learning when you don't even know where you're messing up. Since you're usually in school for only 4 years, you have to make the most of your time, and this implies a fast learning curve on the part of student organizers. That's why trainings that lay out the basics like understanding power relations, group building and leadership development, how to choose a campaign, learning how to use a strategy chart, coalition building, and planning actions are so important. These training often encompass the hard-learned lessons of previous organizers, and therefore allow new organizers to bypass the self-defeating process of "reinventing the wheel". The trainings also emphasize the need to think strategically about campaigns, and to make our goals specific and realizable over a length of time. Yet, these training are often pricey, and probably difficult to afford for a newly form student organization. I think part of any strategy to rebuild the student movement has to figure out a way to provide these training to student organizers at low or no cost. While there already exist organization like the United States Student Association, which provides their members and some interested groups with GROW training, I don't know if they're doing this in the most effective manner. For example, I think that for the price of one of their training's I could have provided four or five. I would have gladly taken a pay cut and focused on training local schools which would have dramatically decreased the cost of the training. One

thing is for sure though, student organizing trainings are a necessary tool for rebuilding the student movement, and as such should be made widely available at a low cost (if any).

Another major obstacle facing the student movement is the inability of most organizations to become institutionalized. It's not uncommon to hear of a certain organization that is very active for a few years, largely with the help of its seasoned leadership, but upon the graduation of several key members it falls apart. If these student organizations keep disappearing after a few years, it makes it quite difficult for a movement to build the necessary traction to win some of the longer term goals. The main obstacle to institutionalizing has to do with student organizations not being able to build new leaders and recruit new members in order keep the organization going. Granted, this is a task that's easier said than done, but what really makes the likelihood of this happening minimal is that most student organizers don't know how to do this effectively. Often time, the progressive groups on campus tend to be rather small, rarely surpassing a membership of 30 people (at least I've never seen one). Out of those 30, maybe 10 will constitute as core members. It takes a really disciplined group to be able to juggle recruitment, leadership development, and running a campaign, all the while going to school and sometimes working a job. Here's where I feel a national organization could be quite useful, as organizer schools or training could be permanently setup for member organizations to send new recruits or future leaders. Though I think the immediate task is to get students trained in basic student organizing skills so as to develop a new batch of leaders than can survive the departure of the previous leaders.

The next critical issue has to do with the focus of the student movement. I feel that too much of the work that students do can be described as, for lack of a better term, solidarity work. Now, let me say this upfront, I'm not against students connecting the dots and recognizing that their desire for liberation is often tied with the struggle and desires of non-students (campus workers, professors, community organizations, workers or other dominated groups struggles' abroad, etc.). Yet, it seems odd to me that while almost all of these other groups are fighting for their self-interest, student organizers tend to largely neglect their own concerns and issues as students. It may be the case that the category of student is somewhat ambivalent, and because student organizing is of an inter-class nature these student concerns may be quite varied. Though, from a working class perspective there are clearly some struggles that stand out. What I take issue with is the predominance that solidarity work has amongst student organizers in relations to the more "bread and butter" student issues. I have often heard students refer to themselves as "privileged" in relation to other sectors of the university and society. While some students may indeed be "privileged" economically and so forth, the mere fact that one is a student should not serve to qualify one as such. I think that the perception that student specific demands are the demands of a more "privileged" sector of society, whether explicitly or implicitly is quite prevalent amongst many progressive student organizers. This, in turn, I think leads to a de-prioritizing of student specific issues by student organizer and organizations.

So, while I don't believe students shouldn't be engaging in solidarity work, I think that more organizing needs to be done around the "bread and butter" student issues to rebuild the student movement. Currently, the affordability of higher education is under attack, and thus, presents an important area of struggle that could affect a large sector of the student population, especially those who're working class. Therefore, I think students need to be fighting more on issues that pertain to making higher education more accessible. These could be fights around tuition hikes, increasing financial aid, bringing down the cost of books, student debt, and potentially free higher education. Yet, I don't see how we're going to win these fights unless there is a strategic refocusing on these issues on the part of student organizers and organizations. I think that it will be largely through these fights that progressive student organizations will begin to generate some mass appeal amongst the student body; as these are issues that tend to affect many students directly. I feel that it's out of these types of struggles that progressive student organization can develop a solid base of support for organizing students today. The levels of consciousness and struggle amongst students in the US are quite low, perhaps the lowest they've ever been, and we need to take this into consideration when trying to determine which struggles require our immediate attention. I believe that it will be largely these "bread and butter" struggles that will help to reinvigorate the student movement, and eventually make it possible to not only win our own struggles as students, but to potentially engage in solidarity work with a greater capacity as our base grows and develops.

Through this account of my own organizing experience, I hope to have demonstrated why I think trainings, the institutionalization of student organizations, and a refocusing on student specific issues by student organizer and organization are necessary for rebuilding the student movement. The trainings are key to helping students think strategically about organizing, make the most of their time as organizers, and avoid as much as possible “reinventing the wheel”. Once students have mastered these basics, the chances of their organizations being able to reproduce leaders and recruit new members to keep the organization alive are highly increased; though eventually something like a national student organization can greatly aid in ensuring that this type of development is happening across the board, and that student organizations on the ground have enough time to focus on both the development of the group and the winning of campaigns. A refocusing on student specific issues is necessary for the rebuilding of the student movement as these issues will often have a greater mass appeal and allow student organizer and organization to build up a base. These student organizations can then engage in solidarity work with greater capacity, and hopefully have a greater impact on what these other struggles can achieve. Rebuilding the student movement will not be an easy task, but one that is nonetheless necessary, as students worldwide have shown their capacity and commitment to struggle for a better and more just world.



Teachers and Public Education are Under Attack in Florida



In this agitational piece, written shortly after Pablo became a teacher, criticizes the school “reform” movement in Florida and advocates for bottom-up direct action to stop a particularly threatening Florida bill then known as SB6/ HB 7189. The piece contributed the groundswell of action and activism against these bills that led to statewide action and an autonomous “sick-out” of educators on April 1, 2010, which Pablo and his comrades helped promote and participated in. While the “sick-out” was condemned by district officials and the leadership of the teachers’ union alike, Republican Governor Crist cited these educators’ actions as a significant factor in pushing him to veto SB6 against the wishes of his party. Published April 8, 2010.

Education reform seems to be the buzzword coming out of all the politicians’ mouths these days, and these words have taken on a menacing form in the case of Florida. In Florida, education reform is supposedly at the bottom of legislation such as HB7189 and SB 6. These companion bills, emerging from the Florida House of Representative and the Senate respectively, claim to have education reform in mind, but are little more than thinly veiled attacks on the teaching profession, and in particularly its unions. While I think there is much to be desired from our public education system, make no mistake about it these bills

simply don't address any of the fundamental problems plaguing our current system. Instead, these bills' authors and supporters seek to advance an "education reform" agenda which emphasis market-driven solutions to complex social problems, as well as furthering the privatization of the public sector. In addition, these bills seek to undermine teachers' unions, and further strip teacher, as well as local school districts, of any autonomy.

For many years now, so-called education reformers have advocated simplistic market-driven formulas to improve education. Much of their solutions have come in the form of charter schools and differential pay for teachers, as well as other competition-based schemes. Examples like Belgium or Sweden, where the parents are given an x amount of money, or voucher, and where the schools must compete with each other in order to attract these walking bundles of cash are often cited as welcomed solutions to our educational woes in America. These are said to be classic example of the market working in perfect order, where consumers vote with their feet, and schools either keep their consumers happy or fail and go out of business.

Unfortunately, a thorough exploration of different educational systems using some sort of voucher program is beyond the scope of this article. Yet, I will say this much, that briefly looking at the Belgian and Swedish systems it's obvious that their academic success cannot be attributed primarily to the fact that competition exist in their education system. They have school on Saturdays, have more courses in the school year, and students are administered tests in 8th grade and 10th grade to see if they should remain on an academic track or switch to a vocational one; it's an entirely different system than the one we have here. Furthermore, both systems have strong teacher unions that can negotiate national contracts for their profession; unions of course are often cited by many "education reformers" as being one of the major obstacles to a better education system here. So, it becomes clear, even from a cursory analysis, that there exist great differences between our education system and theirs. Competition and choice are merely part of the equation, and by no means can account for the entirety or even a significant portion of that systems academic success.

Looking at HB7189 and SB 6 specifically, we find much evidence for the claim that these bills are largely an attack on the teaching profession and on teachers' unions. These bills intend to introduce much desired employee "flexibility" into a profession that has for a long time resisted such incursions. Both bills want to do away with "tenure" or the "professional service contracts usually granted to teachers after 3 years of service, and instead put new teachers on a 5 year probationary period, after which they may be awarded single-year contracts.[1] Even if one wants to argue that tenure should not be giving automatically after a certain number of years of service, it's clear that the one year contracts intend to do away with any sense of job security, making it easier for administrators to get rid of teachers with or without good reason.

Proponents of this bill argue that tenure breeds incompetence by guaranteeing teachers their jobs, regardless of performance, since it makes it more difficult and/or costlier to fire them. While this may be true of some teachers with tenure, it's quite cynical to paint the entire profession with such broad strokes, assuming that all or most teachers are working hard up until the point that they receive tenure, after which they merely cruise by until retirement. Yet, tenure for teachers means that one cannot be fired for non-teaching related issues like personal politics, personality clashes, and nepotism. It also affords teachers due process under the law, putting the burden of proof on administration to demonstrate that one is being fired for being ineffective as a teacher lies entirely with administrators. While there may not be an abundance of evidence linking tenure to an improved learning environment, anecdotally, a teacher with financial piece of mind has to be more conducive to a better learning environment than one that is constantly stressed out by monetary concerns spurred on by lack of job security. Lastly, to answer the remarks of those claiming that since they lack these protections in their jobs everyone else should too, I would suggest that they organize themselves like teachers did in order to win such safeguards instead of merely spitting on those that have them.

Another devastating provision afforded by these bills is the ability to tie fifty percent of a teacher's income to how well their students score on standardized tests like the FCAT.[2] If many educators already feel like the FCAT forces them to teach to the test, how much worse will this be when half of their pay is tied to how well their students do on this one exam! Though the bill intends to eventually replace the FCAT with end-of-the-course examinations in every subject

area, the premise remains the same. Teachers will be forced to further shift away from teaching greatly needed critical thinking skills, and developing higher thought processes in order to teach “beat-the-test” tricks to ensure their students pass the exams. This measure will also exacerbate inequalities within our de facto two-tier education system. A recent study by University of Florida researchers concluded that there is a strong relationship between where students live, family income, and how well they do on standardized tests.[3] They found that students that are more affluent tend to do better on standardized tests like the FCAT. One more factor to keep in mind is that the cost of creating and administering expensive test like the FCAT will only be augmented by the massive size of this new plan for end-of-the-course test in every subject area, and it’s the hard-working people of Florida that will likely be footing the bill.

In addition, these bills intend to do away with higher compensation for years of experience and holding advanced degrees.[4] While perhaps one could argue that there is no conclusive evidence showing that holding an advanced degree necessarily produces greater results in the classroom, the evidence is much more definitive when it comes to experience. As with anything, you’re going to make many mistakes when you first start out, especially in a profession where often times you’re simply given the set of keys to your classroom and told to teach. Lack of funding usually means not affording us such luxuries as mentors; as such, we are forced to seek advice and guidance wherever and whenever we can get it. So it’s preposterous to suggest that experience should not count in determining compensation for work. Regarding compensation for higher degrees and National Board Certification, there is a serious disconnect between what we as a society promote and what this bill is communicating. On the one hand we’re constantly encouraging students to further their education (even if it means getting into massive debt) because of the financial opportunities it provides them, yet on the other, we’re telling teachers that we’ll no longer reward them for their hard work and effort in seeking such degrees. This is clearly an example of the schizophrenic logic that abounds in these bills.

Tenure, advanced degrees, and the like are all supposed to afford you a certain sense of job security, something everyone wants in a system where unemployment is accompanied by stiff penalties, hardships, and an endangerment to your well-being. Yet, certain education reformers and free-market advocates want us to believe that job security in the teaching profession amounts to little more than over-compensated lethargy. Their rationale, whether stated explicitly or implied, is that it’s these “pampered” teachers with their greedy unions that are putting their personal well-being before your child’s education. At the same time, they want to sell these reforms to us as a way for us to make more money, to be compensated at market value.

Yet, it’s precisely these school reformers and entrepreneurs who seek to gain the most from these types of reforms. It’s no secret that Obama’s plan for education aims to expand the existence of charter schools. Both Obama, and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, are huge proponents of charter schools, and have stressed increasing charter schools as one of the criteria for receiving federal money through the Race to the Top (RTTT) program.[5] They will also view favorably any applicants’ plans that look to experiment with merit-based pay for teachers. Most charter schools tend to be non-union, requiring that their employees work longer hours, and often times for less pay. While in some states or districts they have been legally obligated to allow unions, a right-to-work state like Florida certainly isn’t one of those. Many of these free-market education reformers and charter school operators would like nothing more than to have a non-unionized workforce, where they can easily extract more labor from teachers at a cheaper rate. Unions tend to afford a certain degree of protection for workers from this “race to the bottom”, and it’s precisely these protections, as well as a strong public education system, that bills like HB7189 and SB 6 threaten to erode.

There’s also a similar bill that recently passed the House and Senate which aims to expand the amount of money corporations can contribute in exchange for tax-exemptions to a State voucher program for parents seeking to send their kids to private or religious schools.[6] The money the state could be collecting in taxes could be used to fund public education instead. While advocates of such measure cite a study showing that this program actually saved the state money, they ignore that unlike private schools, public schools have a higher rate of special needs students, which tends to drive up the average per pupil cost of education. Furthermore, there are serious questions about separation of church and state if parents are being allowed to fund religious education at the taxpayers’ expense.

These are certainly tough times for public educators in Florida, but it's important to remember that we need not simply accept this situation. While the obstacles are certainly formidable, ultimately the system can't function without us. Many teachers, their friends and families included, incessantly emailed and called their representatives demanding that they vote no on the HB7189 and SB 6, yet both passed. The only thing standing between this bill becoming law is Governor Christ's signature; which he initially said he would sign into law if the bill came before him, but as of lately has been expressing some doubts regarding certain parts of the bill. We as educators, parents, students, and supporters need to be prepared to deal with this scenario, and we must meet these affronts on our profession and our public education system with fierce opposition. We have already tried going through the proper channels and through the political process, and not only has that not gotten us what we want, but if we continue to do so it may very well guarantee that we get exactly what we don't want. They've heard our pleas, and they've chosen not to listen! Now we must stand united and escalate the struggle so that we make sure that they have no choice but to listen and do as we say! Remember that without us the whole system crumbles.

While it's true that withdrawing our labor carries with it some stiff penalties, it would be impossible for them to enforce these punishments if we're able to organize a statewide strike. That was precisely the same idea behind the Civil Rights movements' tactic of filling the jails. They knew that they're commitment to civil disobedience would land them jail, but they also clearly understood that if everybody got arrested, and they filled the jails beyond capacity, the police would have to let them go or risk their jails being rendered inoperable. At the very least, we need to be coordinating actions and activities that bring us out into the streets, and demonstrate to them that we're real people standing out there; not just some voices on an answering machine or soon to be deleted unread message in an inbox. There are plenty of other actions we can take, that while not going as far as a strike, send out a clear message that we're angry, and that we're organized. If they see that we're organized, then our threats to vote them out for supporting these bills become less hollow, and they start to see us as a group of people that they need to take seriously. What's imperative right now is that we organize autonomously and from the ground up, neighborhood by neighborhood, school by school, and district by district. We must be aware that while the unions can aid us in part of the struggle, due to legal constraints they may not be able to facilitate moving this fight as far as it needs to go. For those reasons, organizing autonomously would allow us to bypass such constraint, as well as providing us with the space to organize with the broader community of parents, students, and supporters who want to save public education and our professions integrity. Let's utilize this momentum, and take some inspiration from the recent student walkouts against these bills to build a movement to improve public education.[7] We must not be defeated by our fears, legitimate as they may be, or because we forwent creative actions that demonstrate our power as organized workers and communities in order to adhere to a failing strategy of trying to work through the proper channels. Now is the time for more serious action, and we need to be combining our efforts and coordinating our struggle if we hope to stand a chance of defeating these bills.

[1] "Florida teachers' pay faces big overhaul: A proposed bill that would tie teachers' pay to student performance rather than years of experience has many educators worried." Miami Herald, March 14, 2010.

[2] *ibid.*

[3] "UF Study Finds Link Between Income, Test Scores". <http://www.justnews.com/news/22910656/detail.html>

[4] "Florida teachers' pay faces big overhaul: A proposed bill that would tie teachers' pay to student performance rather than years of experience has many educators worried." Miami Herald, March 14, 2010.

[5] "Race to the Top: Unions Asked to Play Ball for Education Dollars." Labor Notes, January 2010.

[6] "Florida Senate votes to link teachers' pay to student progress and expand vouchers." Sun Sentinel, March 24, 2010.

[7] "Miami-Dade pupils walk out of school in protest." Miami Herald, April 9, 2010.



Who Dismisses the Teacher: On The Work that Follows You Home and Steals Your Sleep

In this personal narrative, Pablo describes the struggles of new teachers by recounting the difficulties of teaching Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate history in his first two years at Miami-Dade County Public Schools. While much of the struggle he recounts deals with difficult work conditions (for example, at times the sleep deprivation became life-threatening) new teachers find themselves in during this era, an added burden for Pablo was the extra effort he spent to ensure that his students were receiving an education constructed for critical thinking and engagement in our world. Just before publishing this piece, one of Pablo's closest friends and comrades in Philly shared with others working on this project that he had met one of Pablo's students at a militant action against ICE - showing the effectiveness of his efforts to influence his students towards liberatory ends. Published April 22, 2012.

I stare up at the computer's clock on the right hand side of the screen, the numbers blaring at me, "10:45 pm." I've finished the PowerPoint presentation for one class, but have nothing prepared for my other class. Luckily for me, tomorrow I have a planning period between 2nd period and 6th period (where I teach we have 90 min block classes, 4 blocks a day), so I can use that time to put something together for the class I wasn't able to plan for the night before. The "even days" afford me such a luxury, the "odd days" don't. On the "odd days", my reaction to this nightly routine is much more irate. Immediately the panic and anxiety sets in. I feel a pain in the side of my stomach, sometimes accompanied by nausea. My girlfriend asks me from the couch if I'm calling it a night, to which I respond with an annoyed, "No!" followed by grumbles about how I'm probably only going to get 3 or 4 hours of sleep that night. She understands that my tone and somber mood have nothing to do with her or her question. She immediately springs to her feet, walks over to the computer, and asks me, "Is there anything I can do?" Some nights, I can ask her to finish downloading a movie for me to show in class, or type up some notes, or impute some grades, but most of the time there's not much she can do, and I'll be in this shitty mood for most of the night, which often times carries over into the morning.

This nighttime scenario has become routine for me in my first two years of teaching. I have been given the opportunity to advance history courses at the high-school level. But as I've soon learned, being offered to teach such classes can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, you're going to get a decent amount of students that actually want to be there and are genuinely interested in the subject; and even those that aren't are at least grade motivated enough or extensively pressured by their parents so as to not be disruptive when they're bored. The downside is the accelerated pace of the course which forces you to cover a large amount of material in a highly condensed schedule, the endlessly regenerating stacks of written assignments and essays you have to grade, and the end of course exams which put a tremendous amount of pressure on new teachers in the age of test-based accountability and year to year contracts. It's become quite clear why none of the veteran teachers in my department jumped at the opportunity to teach such classes when an opening became available. While there's certainly issues of personal capacity (though ideally there shouldn't be and a regular U.S. History teacher should have enough mastery over the content to teach such a class), it's the hours of grading essays, coupled with the end of the year test that most are trying to avoid.

Many people don't understand just how demanding teaching actually is, little less teaching these advance courses at such an early point in your career. Teaching at this higher level requires that one have a good grasp of the content, and while I certainly consider myself to have an above average understanding of U.S. and World History, my desire to introduce

critical perspectives of such subjects demands that I spend more time researching and planning. I'm not comfortable with just teaching a basic, textbook version of these subjects, or simply teaching to the test. As such, I'm usually spending whatever time I have after work-though perhaps it's inaccurate to describe it as such since I'm actually working except it's off the clock- the day before, reading and learning about the topics I will be teaching the following day. In that time, I not only have to read and write up notes, but I also have to create lesson plans and find time to grade so that I can give them back their assignments with corrective feedback in a timely manner. I have to research supplementary readings to assign them; or I have to find visuals, graphics, audio and video that I can use to create somewhat engaging PowerPoint presentations.

Like many people working under pressure, I've adapted, and I've become quite good at coming up with lessons on the fly and improvising. But this does nothing to alleviate the pressure of knowing that day in and day out I have to go and stand up in front of class after class, trying to teach them about subjects and topics I care dearly about (and ones' that I don't but still have to cover because the test makers may decide to include them in the end of course test), and hopefully, get them interested in history so that they understand how this knowledge can help them transform their lives for the better and the lives of those around them.

You see, for me, being an educator is more than simply a way to earn a paycheck or preparing students for college or to pass a test. It's about helping to foster the skills, intellectual curiosity, empathy and passion so that these students can learn how to think critically about the past and the present so as to imagine, and hopefully to construct, a radically different world. These desires to have education serve a more liberatory purpose, though obviously not shared amongst all in the teaching profession, is not entirely unrelated to the sense of duty or responsibility that many educators, and other involved in social or healthcare work, feel towards those they serve. School administrators and politicians know this, and they often will utilize such insights to keep teachers in check, especially when it concerns teacher's trying to organize or improve their working conditions. Yet, most teachers go into teaching because they feel this sense of social responsibility, they want to effectuate some kind of change in society, or simply help people obtain a slightly better life (though too much is made by educators and politicians of the ability of education to improve people's financial situation). So, as a teacher who is trying to use education for such liberatory purposes, I do feel a greater need to spend time researching and planning lessons that can meet my own understandings of a truly radical pedagogy while at the same time dealing with the institutional constraints of largely teaching to a test, and in a setting that more often than not stifles creativity and intellectual curiosity.

Yet it's the issue of sleep, or lack thereof that makes the situation all the more grueling, and in more than one occasion potentially deadly. In a way, it's certain personal desire that pushes me to invest so much of my free time into my job, working long hours off the clock. Yet, the institutional constraints such as inflexibility of work hours and schedules, lack of paid planning time, the focus on standardized test results, and general job insecurity play as much, if not more, of a role in why I'm often sleep deprived and stressed out. If schools districts adopted two shifts, a morning and afternoon, teachers such as myself could potentially have the option of starting work later, even if that meant getting off a bit later. The way the school day is currently set up, everyone in our district that teaches high school has to be at the job site by 7:10 AM and classes start at 7:20 AM. This schedule not only impacts many students' ability to learn, but in my case, it affects my ability to teach because most people in the room are suffering from sleep deprivation. Since I'm sleep deprived going into work, by the time I get out of work at 2:20 (I really don't leave the school until 2:45 because of traffic, and twice a week not until 3:30 because I tutor students to help prepare them for the exam), when I get home, I usually have to take a short nap to finish the rest of the work I need to do to prepare for the following day. Of course, having less classes to teach, and more paid planning periods would mean that we wouldn't have to take so much work home with us, and therefore, would allow us to spend more time living our lives instead of slaving away even when we're off the clock. The focus on standardized test results as a measure of teacher efficacy, coupled with the abolishing of longer term contracts, and moving all new employees to yearly contracts (which can be terminated at any point and for whatever reason) create an environment where most new and young teachers feel compelled to take on more task and more work

just to look better in the eyes of administrators.

It's placed me in a situation where I have to commute over 90 miles a day to and from work because I don't want to put in a hardship transfer and potentially end up with no job, since teaching jobs are scarce right now (the fear being that there won't be job openings elsewhere and that my current employer will not want to rehire me since I'm trying to get transferred). It's the lack of sleep, combined with this long commute that has put me in several close calls since I've fallen asleep behind the wheel only to wake up just in time before hitting another car or going off the road and crashing into a ditch. I can't tell you how grateful I am for the grooves on the shoulder of the road that violently rattle your car when the rubber tires make contact with the corrugated asphalt; it's been the only thing saving me from crashing into a guard rail or into a ditch. It's so bad that if I'm not home by 3:30 PM, and I forget to text my girlfriend that I'm running late, she automatically calls me to make sure I'm ok and on my way home. This last aspect of sleep deprivation is by far the scariest, and yet, I don't feel like there's much I can do about it at the moment because my girlfriend is unemployed and we're living with her parents in order to save up money to move closer to where I work. Though lately, after one too many close encounters, I've committed myself to stop working by 10:30 PM, and to be in bed by 11:30 PM, but even this is wishful thinking because my brain is usually not ready to shut off, and even less so if I had to stop before finishing planning for all classes.

Overall, this is how my life has been for the past two years. Often times, the days feel like they're seamlessly blurring into each other. The day melts into the night, but unfortunately the night does not bring respite from the working day. At the end of every school year, I don't know if I'll have a job or not since the school district is having financial problems. I'm not sure exactly what classes I'm going to be teaching, which makes it quite difficult to plan for classes over the summer. They could ask me to teach an entirely new class, which would require learning a whole new curriculum. Being asked to teach another class would probably be the worst thing that could happen to me, short of not being rehired, as a new class entails more research and planning outside of work. Next year will also be a trying year if I'm told to teach a whole new class because I'm finishing up some coursework for my professional certification, and that means going to classes after work, and on the weekends. I often hear from veterans to stick with it, and that the first two years are the hardest. I'm lucky to have a supportive girlfriend and comrades, but I wonder what I would have done if I didn't? The statistic in the U.S. is that 50 percent of new teachers quit within their first 5 years of teaching, and after only being in it for two years, I completely understand why.



Reflections on Teacher Organizing and Struggle *(Unfinished)*

This reflection on the autonomous teacher “sick-out” on April 12, 2010 was unfinished and never published due to the concern that it might undermine the organizing efforts of Pablo and his comrades within the education industry at the time. However, Pablo emphasizes the need for formal organizing efforts between these upsurges of activity to avoid actions being merely reactive and dying out as quickly as it emerged. The roots of some of the largest #Red4Ed teacher actions of Miami-Dade County in 2018 can be found in the work that Pablo was a part of in 2010 based in some of these reflections.

Last Spring, over a quarter of Miami-Dade County teachers' decided to go on a wildcat strike. Though not calling it a wild-cat strike, and opting instead for the more benign sounding “sick-out”, teachers in Miami-Dade county took part in what was essentially a wildcat strike; something unheard of in recent memory for the teachers. This wildcat strike, or sickout, was in response to two nefarious pieces of legislation (SB- 6 and HB 7189) which had just cleared their respective houses, and now awaited further action from the Governor. These bills intended to further strip teachers' of

control over their labor process, and introduce greater degrees of casualization to the profession by removing multi-year teacher contract commonly referred to as “teacher tenure”; as well as tying teachers’ pay to students’ standardized test scores, and doing away with higher pay for years of experience and holding advanced degrees. The bills provoked a great deal of outrage, and rightly so, from educators, students, and their allies. A month’s worth of union-sponsored rallies in Tallahassee, mass emailing and phone calls to countless state senators and representative, and after-school pickets culminated on Monday morning, April 12, when over 6,300 of Miami-Dade’s 21, 260 public school teachers decided to call in sick, or take a personal day from work. What follows is an account of the day’s event, as well as an analysis of the potential and limitations of such actions, with a look at how we can continue to build our power as educators.

Initially, opposition to these bills took on a relatively mild form; adhering to the predetermined, acceptable forms of struggle typically promoted by United Teachers of Dade (UTD) and other unions. This involved a lot of lobbying, rallies, and contacting of elected officials and representatives. Despite these activities, SB 6 and HB 7189 both passed through their respective houses. At this point, the unions began encouraging teachers to stage pickets before and after school at their work sites. The attendance at these pickets varied with some schools getting a majority of teachers and staff to participate, and others struggling to get a dozen people to participate. Once these bills passed in their respective houses, the Governor, Charlie Crist had a week to sign it, veto it, or not do anything and let it become a law without his signature. It was on Friday afternoon that some of us started hearing rumors about a “sick-out” on Monday. There was also a rumor about teachers meeting up at Tropical Park on Monday to protest against the bills. These messages of not going into work on Monday, and to gather at Tropical Park were being disseminated fast, with no one really knowing the source of such plans.

While the sick-out was largely organize through texts messages and Facebook groups, we in Miami Autonomy & Solidarity (MAS) decided to put out a statement of support, calling for teachers to join the sick-out on Monday, and to meet at Tropical Park at 10 am. We put this statement up on our blog, posted it to several Facebook groups opposing SB 6, and circulated it to other teachers and allies that we know. Over the weekend, those of us who work in education and are members of MAS got together to draft a flyer for Monday. We decided that our priority at the moment was to help set up a communications list which teachers could use to coordinate their activities in the upcoming weeks, and in the future. We had no way of gauging what might be the level of participation in the sick-out, or whether people would actually congregate at Tropical Park on Monday morning. At one point, we even chastised ourselves for suggesting a meet up time in our statement of support that could potentially endanger teachers by exposing them to employers who might be watching news coverage of the protest during school hours. We certainly failed to understand then that the teachers who would show up to Tropical Park during school hours on Monday where quite aware of the potential consequences they faced, and where taking action in spite of these possible repercussions.

Monday morning was filled with a great deal of anxiety and excitement for us. We had no idea what to expect when we got to Tropical Park at 9am. Reports were coming out from the District over the weekend, and early as early as Monday morning, that relatively few teachers (less than 5%) were expected to call in sick on Monday (this may have been a tactic by the District to demoralize teachers who were ambivalent about participating in the sick-out , and get them to come into work instead). Nonetheless, by noon it was obvious that such reports were not true, and that indeed over 25 percent of teachers in the District had called in “sick” to work or taken a personal day. This did not close schools down, but it did disrupt regular school operations, leaving many schools scrambling to find enough personnel to cover classes in several schools.

Upon our arrival, we were pleasantly surprised to discover that many teachers had indeed shown up to protest at the park, with many of them arriving before us. The sick-out was adamantly opposed by the teacher unions. Striking or organized sick-outs are illegal in the state of Florida, and could lead to all sorts of punitive actions, including decertification, against the unions advocating or supporting such actions. We immediately got to work handing out our flyers, which laid out our argument against SB 6 and for more autonomous, bottom up organizing by teachers, as well as

directions on how to sign up to a communications list we set up for organizing and coordinating more activities in a more secure, less public space. At its peaks, 12pm and 4pm, the protest had over 1000 people. The response to our efforts to set up such a venue for teachers to continue organizing was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. We spent all day, from 9am-6pm handing out flyers and trying to talk to people about why we need coordinate our efforts better, and why we need to be organizing both within and outside of the union. Again, the response to this was largely positive. We left the protest feeling proud of the work we had done, and quite optimistic about the possibilities of this struggle against SB 6 developing into the beginnings of a more militant streak amongst Miami-Dade county teachers.

The next day teachers returned to work. It would take another day for Governor Crist to veto the bill, even though he had until Friday to make a decision. If I remember correctly, I heard the news of Crist's veto at the rally held by UTD outside the Miami-Dade County School District's office. This rally, though purportedly having about 1000 people present, seemed quite different from Monday's protest. I think the main difference was that the crowd on Monday was more diverse, with many non-union members participating; whereas the UTD event appeared to be mostly people involved with the union. We also noticed that the reception to our flyers was lukewarm at this event. It could have been because Crist had already vetoed the bill; or perhaps, our efforts to organize autonomously, and our call for organizing both within and outside the union did not sit too well with some of the more staunch union supporters and their leadership. Of course, this is only speculation, and it's hard to tell what exactly made for the different dynamics and interactions at both event.

Once the bills had been vetoed, it sapped all the energy and militancy from the emerging movement. Our list only managed to get about 13 people signed up out of the thousand or so people we flyer'd. The Facebook groups saw an immediate decline in traffic and activity. Demobilization was rapidly taking place. On our communications list, the silence was deafening, with many attempts to ignite conversations about future struggles or the need for greater strategizing to build up our movement receiving little to no responses. The sick out was a sign of people's frustration with the political process and the largely ineffective strategies and tactics adopted by the unions in fighting these bills. At an intuitive level, people understood that more dramatic action would be necessary to convince Crist that teachers were willing to escalate their activities if he did not veto the bill. Had the bill become law though, I think it's unclear as to whether or not teachers would have engaged in further wildcats. For all it's potential to increase militancy amongst teachers, the sick out appears to have been largely an instance of desperation; the culmination rather than the beginning of a new cycle of struggle.

The wildcat strike, or sick out in this case, was instrumental in getting the bills vetoed. While it's true that Christ's office was inundated with phone calls and emails, neither of these can really demonstrate how much power a group actually has; for that, you need to take the streets. Taking the streets requires a higher level of commitment than making a few calls or sending some emails, and politicians know this. Until they see such shows of force, they are not likely to take us seriously. Strategies that rely heavily on lobbying and courting elected officials are not adequate or appropriate for the kind of attacks we're facing as teachers. Furthermore, such approaches don't help to build up our collective power since participation in such activities is usually infrequent and limited, as they require travelling to the state capital. Not to mention that in the world lobbying, money speaks the loudest, and our opponents tend to be very well funded. So our real power is in our organizing capacity, in our ability to mobilize teachers, and to disrupt the educational system by withdrawing our services.

In this regard, unions like UTD have been relatively weak. Rank and File participation in the union is minimal. They are further hamstrung by legal constraints forbidding teachers from striking. As such, our teachers' unions in Florida are extremely limited vehicles for carrying out these fights. Reforming the union may be an option further down the line when there's more rank and file participation, and a greater sense of class consciousness amongst its members. Yet, to prioritize intra-union politics as our main theater of struggle is to ignore history at our own peril. We have to think about

creating alternative structures that are better equipped for struggle. One's that allow for the kind of flexibility that ...
[end]



Fighting Walmart in Midtown: The Need to Go Beyond Glorifying “Smallness” and Ethical Consumerism

During the activist resurgence following Occupy Miami, Pablo continued his work in trying to engage with activists from a revolutionary anti-capitalist perspective to develop a stronger systemic, class and racial analysis when developing strategy in their campaigns. This nuanced critique of the campaign to “Save Midtown” from Walmart provides excellent insight into the failures of middle class and liberal “ethical consumerism” efforts which lack these insights and strategic approaches. Published August 6, 2012.



Pablo opening the first general assembly meeting of Occupy Miami at Government Center in 2011.

Recently in Miami, a showdown has been brewing between a group of activist, artist, business owners, and some residents of Midtown over the building of a new Walmart. They've started a campaign called Save Midtown, and have embarked on a mission to stop Walmart from setting up shop in the trendy Miami neighborhood. So far, they've succeeded in beating back the retail giant, whose application for securing a right to change current city planning and zoning laws to allow them to build loading docks along North Miami Avenue, a busy pedestrian and vehicular street, was rejected by the City of Miami's Planning & Zoning Appeals Board. While this ruling can be categorized as a temporary victory against one of the most powerful emblems of the neoliberal age, the way this campaign is being framed is very problematic to say the least. Even though some of those involved with the Save Midtown campaign rightly take Walmart to task for its deplorable environmental and labor practices at home and abroad, there's very little discussion about what makes Walmart so popular amongst the working class and low-income patrons of the store, and a real blind spot about what can be done to change that outside of ethical consumerism.

The Save Midtown website gives numerous reasons for why Walmart would be harmful to the Midtown community, but perhaps the most ironic one would have to be that Walmart would change the character of the neighborhood; an example of the proverbial teapot calling the kettle black if I've ever heard one. The Midtown project has been challenged by housing rights and anti-gentrification groups for some time, arguing that creations like Midtown-whose developers unabashedly admit to trying to recreate the "New York's SoHo district with a Miami twist," SoHo being a model for gentrification- are part of a social phenomenon by wealthy and more affluent people to reclaim urban areas while pushing out the long-term working class or low income residents of such neighborhoods, many of which are Black or Latino. Yet, aside from this rather laughable at best, cynical at worst, accusation that Walmart would change the "character" of the neighborhood-which I can only take to mean that it would attract the unhip, poor people that used to populate the area before the trendy lofts and chic restaurants came around-the majority of the reasons for opposing Walmart by Save Midtown tend to fall along such lines.

At a micro-level, the concerns are mostly about how the trendy image of the neighborhood will be negatively impacted by the presence of the big box retailer, coupled with arguments about how Wal-Mart will adversely impact "small businesses" (some of which are international and local chains), and fair critiques about how pedestrian and cyclist might be unfavorably affected- though I can't help but find this claim annoying coming from, wittingly or unwittingly, gentrifiers more concerned with creating their New Urbanist oasis in a historically low-income Puerto Rican neighborhood with little regard for how such endeavors contribute to the displacement of poor and working class people living in the impoverished area. With the campaign being framed in largely these terms, it should come as no surprise that many of the long term residents that still live in and within the surrounding neighborhoods of the site where the proposed Walmart would be built are not flocking to join or support Save Midtown's efforts.

As someone who is quite aware of the horrendous labor and environmental practices of Walmart, you won't hear me disputing or debating the claims made by numerous studies and sources about how Wal-mart in general is not good for workers, tax payers, local economies, women, peripheral countries or the environment. I won't list all of them, because there are too many, but just googling anti-Walmart or going to this Wikipedia article that will provide you with many resources. You will not see me adopting the cynical, apologist positions of some economist that sweatshops are a good thing for the desperate people of peripheral nations. Though, I must say that under capitalism, those are essentially the alternatives for people in the so-called Third world; it really is a Hobsonian choice between sweatshops or digging through mountains of garbage, and this is why it's so important to oppose the disease causing much of this misery and injustice, capitalism, and not just its symptoms. So, while I strongly believe there are plenty of good reasons to oppose Walmart and its business model, I also think that how we fight such targets can have a tremendous impact for what we're trying to build.

So far, this fight is taking place in a manner that is divisive and short-sighted. It's a fight being waged completely within the confines of capitalism's logic. It's pitting many working class people living in relative poverty against progressive activist, many of which tend to be professionals, students and/or more affluent. Sadly, as the New Times article reports, the split seems to be happening not only along class, but racial lines as well, with many of the Black residents in favor of Walmart opening up shop, and many of those opposed being White or of lighter skin. While the New Times can often be quite unfair when it comes to covering social movements in South Florida, especially Occupy related activities, this account doesn't seem far fetched or surprising to me.

The reality is that most working-class people in this country are on a restricted budget, and in many ways, they face their own Hobson's choice not dissimilar to the one confronting their global counterparts. When one lives in a world where a missed paycheck can be the difference between sleeping in a home, sleeping in a shelter, or the streets, making every dollar stretch is not a matter of choice but of survival. I know this reality all too well because for most of my life this has been my reality. Even today, when I'm employed as a public employee, I have an unemployed dependent with school

debt, and several family members I'm helping out financially (part of being working class in my experience means that my parents have no real savings or a retirement fund because whatever little extra money they had was always spent on the family first, so their kids are their retirement plan). Once you factor in all the other necessities one requires living in suburban sprawled Miami, there's not much left there if one is trying to save money for a potential emergency. Even so, I consider myself relatively privilege financially compared to many people in this city, and yet, I've found that boycotting Wal-Mart is not really an option even for me.

It's also not an option for the majority of the working class because ethical consumerism, the politics of voting with your dollars, doesn't address the hard-nose reality that for most working class people, voting with your dollars means going to where it's most affordable and time efficient, and that's still for the most part Walmart. Even if you think that Walmart's affordability is only true in the short-term, living paycheck to paycheck often means that short term concerns take priority, and that'll probably continue to be the case until people begin organizing and acting collectively, debating and discussing their problems, and coming up with their own collective solutions. These types of alternatives to the individualistic politics of ethical consumerism does not appear to be an overtly stated goal of the Save Midtown campaign or of the activist involved.

Unfortunately though, an ethical consumerist strategy of an individually initiated personal boycott of Walmart , and a general plea to support small businesses, is what I've understood to be a legitimate and practical way of resisting, if not the end all be all, from many anti-Walmart activists involved in this campaign. Their solutions are solutions completely in line with the same "free" market system that gives rise to the monster they oppose. Wal-Mart is not an anomaly of capitalism; it's the embodiment of the basic principle that drives capitalism: the need to accumulate. Capitalism has one slogan: "Accumulate or Die Trying" Walmart doesn't destroy small businesses, capitalism does. The illusory notion that if we just got rid of all these "evil" corporations, we could return to some mythical golden era of Mom-and-Pop shops is merely wishful thinking. What we need is imaginative thinking! Small businesses are treated as some homogenous entity always preferable to large, big-box retailers like Walmart.

Yet, I see very little proof of local small businesses which also happen to be supporters of workers and environmental rights. How many of them pay a living wage, offer their employees healthcare, paid sick days, paid vacation, or even the right to have a union? How many of the supposed businesses are actually small businesses, as opposed to less successful chains, offering their employees or customers a better deal than Walmart? Even if you're able to name some entities which are indeed small businesses and environmentally and socially responsible, how does this in any way address the economic reality of many working class people, who short on time and money, can find everything they need within their budget at a place like Walmart? I'm not sure how many large companies and corporations stack up to the local, small businesses here in Miami on these criteria, but there's at least one large big-box retailer that appears to be offering an alternative to the Walmart model when it comes to employee benefits, and that Costco. Now, maybe they're the exception to the rule, and honestly, my point isn't to find stores worthy of the ethical consumers approval, but to raise some questions about this individualistic, market-based strategy, as well as the "smaller is better" mantra advocates of ethical consumerism and the Save Midtown campaign seem to be promoting.

Ethical consumerism is an incredibly limited, individualistic strategy to address a very large, multi-faceted and collective problem. Ethical consumers assume that by informing people about the unethical practices of a business and encouraging other to stage indefinite personal consumer boycott too, that the grand majority of people will make the more "ethical" choice, regardless of whether that choice makes the most sense for them economically. It assumes a level of solidarity that honestly doesn't exist at the moment, and which they've done nothing to really build, spread, or sustain. How then is this not a strategy best suited to the more affluent, who can literally afford to make consumer choices based primarily on how ethical the company is, and secondarily on price, is beyond me.

Again, this is why I take issue with a lot of the rhetoric and framing of the Save Midtown campaign. Much of it has this air of moral superiority, of “feel good-ism”, without thinking or considering what might genuinely prevent many working class people from adopting such an approach. Now, don’t misunderstand me, I’m not saying that participating in a consumer boycott is always an inappropriate strategy. I certainly try to honor consumer boycotts that are within a specific time frame, of a specific firm, and initiated by or in coordination with the workers, usually engaged in an industrial dispute with an employer. The difference here is that such consumer boycotts are part of a collective response that seeks to unite workers and consumers as the workers try to organize themselves and their communities to confront a common enemy on multiple fronts.

I believe it is this type of collective approach, based around organizing with those most affected by the injustices of capitalism, that activists in such campaigns should be promoting. They need to reach out to the low-income residents still holding out in places like Wynwood, Little Haiti, and the other surrounding neighborhoods. It’s important for activists to engage with them in a dialogue about how capitalism takes advantage of them, how it exploits workers domestically and internationally, pitting people who have every interest in fighting together against each other. Perhaps, if they did that, they would see that preventing a Walmart from setting up shop in Midtown is not necessarily the most strategic fight. At the very least, I would hope that they would move beyond strategies, tactics and language which not only reflects their far more economically comfortable place in life, but also does little to challenge the system that gives rise to things like Wal-Mart, as well as the consumers and workers that come to rely on it for the cheap products and jobs.

It seems like at least some involved in the campaign may be thinking more along the route of doing some organizing that might address the question of Walmart ‘s atrocious record on workers’ rights more directly. It appears at least one Walmart “associate” has made connection with some community organizers. This Walmart employee recently wrote a piece condemning the working conditions at Wal-Mart, and suggesting that part of the solution may involve raising the Federal minimum wage to \$10 an hour. While raising the minimum wage is a better place to start resisting and challenging Walmart than the ethical consumer approach, this is not likely to be won without massive organizing efforts by most workers, whether unionized or otherwise. Unfortunately, I don’t have the space to discuss raising the minimum wage, or the campaigns being launched to address this issue. It’s important that activist begin to think more like organizers. They need to think more about what it would take for the people suffering the most from capitalism to take control of their communities and their lives so that ecocidal, human-rights violating, misery-producing corporations like Walmart have no reason to exist, since the people themselves will take care of each other, and won’t depend on this dog-eat-dog system for their livelihoods, well being, or happiness. If we want to someday live in a world like this, then we have to get involved in fights where we are at, and with those that suffer the most under this system. We need to be asking ourselves why do people need Walmart in the first place, and how could we create a world where we don’t need to sell our minds and our bodies for the benefit of a tiniest minority of humanity. How can we make sure that our fights aren’t dividing people, and putting progressive minded folks at odds with working and lower class folks? I don’t pretend to have all the answers, but I agree with the saying that sometimes” asking the right question is half the answer.” So, let’s start asking ourselves those difficult questions, let’s move and think outside of our comfort zones.

Now, let me reemphasize, I’m not opposed to a campaign to stop Walmart from opening up more stores, and I know and respect several individuals working on this campaign. Yet, despite my efforts to engage and convince them to rethink their approach and how they frame this campaign, I haven’t seen or heard of any plans to do so in the near future. So, my hope is that this piece will help move forward a discussion around what types of fights we decide to take on and how we fight them. The question of class and the system that recreates these social relations, in which the few benefit at the expense of the many, need to be front and center if we want to destroy the cancer that is capitalism.



Presentation on Intermediate Analysis

Los Angeles Anarchist Bookfair - September 8, 2012

Miami Autonomy and Solidarity did not come up with the concept of the intermediate or intermediary level (which they used interchangeably as Pablo does within the talk below), but the group contributed to developing the analysis and arguing for the level as a strategic site of struggle for the time period. This piece provides context, definition, and argues for the strategic importance of the intermediate/intermediary level. The following is an audio transcription of a presentation by Pablo at the Los Angeles Anarchist Bookfair on September 8, 2012. The audio version can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/PabloLAABF2012>

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Hi, well, thank you guys for coming and definitely thank the organizers of the LA anarchist bookfair for inviting me here. It's a real honor to be present here and be part of the LA anarchist scene and what you guys are doing.

So today, what I wanted to discuss a bit is, I'm a member of a specific anarchist political organization, like Kapila said. And the organization I'm a part of -- Miami Autonomy & Solidarity -- has been together since 2008. Many of us came together after a long time of being involved in social movement work. I started off doing student organizing. And then some kind of paid organizing, community organizing, but after a while of doing that kind of stuff, you know, I kept on running into certain walls, right, certain walls with bureaucracy, certain walls with you know, the idea of where the executive directors of some of the organizations wanted to go. You know, all the limits that exist in trying to work in that world. So I was introduced by a couple of comrades to this idea of *especificismo*, which is a tradition that originates in South America, starts largely in Uruguay, and has spread out to several different countries in Latin America -- Chile, Argentina -- definitely has made its way around the continent, and it definitely emerges

out of their particular situations dealing with dictatorship and repression and, you know, anarchists for a long period of time, you know, suffering from that kind of repression dealing with competing tendencies and all those challenges and sort of coming back in the 1990s and trying to regroup and once again become a social force in the social movements that exist.

So those ideas kind of inspired me to start thinking about: well, what can we do as anarchists to ensure that we don't just become just a subculture, just a hobby, you know, just like a lifestyle, or a personal interest, but to actually have an

impact and effect on social movements and to build with them and to grow with them. That was the purpose of forming a group like Miami Autonomy and Solidarity and taking that approach; but one of the things that we are starting to see as we formed this organization is that the context of the United States and of course of a city like Miami, which is renowned for its kind of reactionary, right-wing politics, makes it very difficult to operate like a specific anarchist organization. Whereas in some other parts of the world or even some other parts of the country, you have infrastructures of what we might call the left where people can plug into. You have a stronger history of mass movements and that memory of strong social movements is there. In Miami, that's largely non-existent, right? So we have to really think hard about how are we as anarchists going to begin to play a role in the almost either really small or non-existent mass organizations in Miami. How do we begin to work so we can have an impact and start to spread around more libertarian ideas, anarchist ideas, and become relevant again to the class struggle.

So part of what we've been thinking about for the past couple of years, since I'd say 2010-11, we've been thinking hard about how to do that. One of the things that we've identified where we're at and we think this is also relevant to many parts of the United States: there exists a layer which we recognize as the intermediate layer (and I'll explain what that is in a second). Just to give a little back story or you know theory, or sorry, an explanation of how many anarchists have been involved in mass movement work tend to think about how to go about carrying out that work. We tend to think about there's a revolutionary level, and then there's a mass level right? And as far as these two levels are concerned, we tend to express within the especificist tradition and other traditions that run concurrent with that particular tendency, we tend to think that anarchists have to be involved in both levels. So there's a need for revolutionary anarchist organizations; but we also need mass movements and these two things have to go together. Right? You can't just have a revolutionary organization without any mass movements and mass movements without revolutionary organizations who are in there working, agitating, you know, creating propaganda and kind of growing side by side with these movements, at times they can take many different directions -- directions which we might feel are going to take us to that level of social revolution and eventually something like an anarchist communist society. So we begin from that point.

So what I'm going to talk about a little bit today is looking a little bit at the nature of the period that we're in, and then thinking about some of the objectives that we would like to carry out and bring into effect, umm, talk a little bit about the different levels that we see existing, right? And talk about why the intermediate level might be the most strategic site of struggle for movements in North America today. And then we can have some discussion about what people's experiences have been with things like that. Does this kind of analysis and proposal make sense? We can talk about that stuff after the presentation.

So what's the nature of the period? If we're going to categorize the nature of the period in the United States, we are currently living through what we might describe as a period of low level of mass struggle and militancy, right? We don't exist, we don't live in a time where there are burgeoning social movements, where there is this very sharp class struggle that can be exhibited. So this is the condition that I think we are dealing with in the United States and especially in a city like Miami, where I live. In regards to mass movements, the mass movements that do exist during this time period, we find that either at times they are non-existent (again Miami is a good example of that) or they are highly bureaucratized mass organizations, right? So here we have a picture of course of SEIU, Obama, kind of one hand washes the other. Critiques of the non-profit industry have been something that have been put out with more and more force lately and that's definitely a good development. But we still haven't overcome that yet; we're still dealing with this issue of non-profit bureaucratized struggles, struggles that are largely co-opted or cooperationist, you know, that work with capital instead of trying to overturn it. So often times the level of consciousness is also there. It's also like a funny, you know, kind of portrayal of the left in these times you know, everybody will talk shit about how the system sucks and, you know, lesser of two evils, but at the end of the day, you know, we're still going to vote for them; we're still going to support that, and that's what we have to do, right, to stay connected with the mass movements again that largely are either non-existent or very bureaucratized.

As far as the left and many revolutionary traditions, I think that definitely anarchists will fall within this: there seems to be a disconnect in terms of being able to influence, being able to have an ongoing dialogue and discussion with mass movements or mass organizations. Often times the activities of anarchists and revolutionaries seems to be very disconnected from the daily lives of struggle of average people; you know, working class people.

Alright, so as class struggle revolutionary anarchists which is how MAS sees itself, our objectives are to at some point work towards this point where we will have something like a social revolution initiated by the popular classes, by the working classes, by those most oppressed in a capitalist, in a – what's the word I'm looking for -- imperialist system. So we definitely think that if a revolution is to happen and if something like anarchist communism is ever something that we might see or you know work towards, then we need to start thinking strategically, right? We need to start thinking strategically about how we do our work, how we come to have an influence, how we come to play a larger role, in mass struggles or mass organizations. So the primary goal of revolutionary organizations in the short, medium and long-term is to contribute to building an autonomous, self-managed, libertarian revolutionary consciousness, capacity and power of these movements so that they can create that revolution in the long term.

Most of us have the analysis that revolution of this sort isn't going to happen overnight, it's a long term struggle. Most of us will probably -- I don't like to say this, I don't like to think about this -- but we may not even see it within our lifetime. So we have to be committed to a long term struggle to keep on pushing and in order to do that we definitely need to be strategic.

So we think that in these moments where mass organizations are in the state that they're in, mass movements are in the state that they're in, class struggle is in the state that it's in, we need to figure out a way in which again anarchists and anarchism can become relevant within these mass struggles and mass movements. So what MAS is going to propose is that instead of just thinking about there's a revolutionary level and there's a mass level and what revolutionaries should be working within the mass level, we might even have to just start thinking about: how do we build up a mass level, right? And if mass organizations aren't in existence, then how do we do that? How do we as revolutionaries not become detached, disconnected... simply become a populist group, a group that sits around just talking theory and not being able to create an action that actually challenges capitalism or being involved in struggles that actually challenge capitalism?

So this intermediary level, it's not necessarily a new analysis. If we look at the history of many different revolutionary groups, they've come to similar conclusions, they've identified that we see not only a mass level and a revolutionary level; but there's also what I'd describe as an intermediary level and the intermediary level is basically the level where people are definitely more conscious, they're more militant; but they many not necessarily be united around a particular set of beliefs or ideology. But they are capable of working together for mid-term and short-term goals. So we see that largely as an intermediate level. And we want to be able to develop this level more, so that this level can in turn help to build up mass movements and build them up in a direction where you know, they're not going to become bureaucratized or they're going to try to fight those tendencies that are trying to co-opt them. So that little graphic is supposed to kind of show the complexity and interplay that exists between mass level, intermediate level and the revolutionary level. Of course reality is messy and, you know, we find that there are revolutionaries in the mass level, there are revolutionaries in the intermediate level, there are people who are from the mass level in the intermediate level. It's not necessarily kind of like a clean-cut situation.

Now, each level exists regardless, right, of whether there's an organization there. So the mass level exists, whether the mass level is organized is a different story, right? Same think with the intermediate and revolutionary level. These levels exist. There are people who are thinking about these things; there are people who are trying to fight for certain needs; but they may not be organized themselves yet. So it's important to draw that distinction between that and try to unify the level with organization. So the level as a theoretical concept definitely is full of a lot of gray areas and one thing I'd like to point out is that this is definitely something that is more of an analysis at this point that we are trying to develop into a

practice and that is part of the reason that I am doing this talk today; because I want to hear what people think about this and to see if folks have experience with this and are thinking about this on the same terms because we're still developing a strong practice that can either prove or disprove this analysis.

So the mass level, right, is the broadest level. At the mass level, usually it can include people from all types of backgrounds, all types of ideological backgrounds, right? You have people who are thinking very much within the system, Republican/Democrat, and you also have people who are thinking outside of it as well maybe in a more radical direction. So mass level organizations are open to anybody in those sectors, anybody who is trying to fight around particular needs usually can be part of a mass organization. A good example of this, of course historically, has been labor unions. Labor unions for the most part, members did not have to belong to a specific party. Again, you can be a democrat, you can be a republican, you can be no party affiliation, you can be an anarchist, a communist, it didn't matter. But the whole point of the mass level is that you're fighting around these struggles that affect your day to day life, it could be wages, it could be anything of this sort.

Now at this time, the mass level, is mostly associated with these very short term objectives. When we look at mass organizations, we're usually talking about short term objectives: a wage raise, you know, certain securities at work, for the most part mass level organizations at this point are not discussing a longer term strategy, are not at the point where they're talking revolution yet. So this is where we find ourselves in this moment.

Now the intermediate level includes militants from the mass level, it can include organizers, people who are working either within the non-profit sector or outside of it, organizing on their own -- it can include a whole variety of people who identify as activists of different ideological persuasions. So when we talk about the intermediary level, this is really what we're talking about. This layer that exists out there, but may or may not be organized. And those are just some examples, historically, of how some people have conceived of the intermediate level.

Alright, now, when it comes to the intermediate level, we find people that tend to be more committed to struggles and are unified around a certain set of objectives. They may not have theoretical unity with each other. That means that they may not all seek the revolution in the same way; they may not all see it ultimately happening in the same way; but at least they have currently some unity around these short term and mid term strategies.

Now in the intermediary level, you could have multiple intermediary level groupings or organizations within a mass organization, right? Again, like I said, a good example would be unions. In a union you can find people of all stripes. So what are the kind of purposes for something like the intermediary level: to work on short term objectives as well as medium term objectives. And this can be struggling around wages; struggling around some job site grievances. It could be longer term, it could be related to bringing together people of different industries, right? So like for example, you have a workplace you're organizing in; maybe that struggle is successful, maybe it died down. What do you do with those people? Where do those militants go? They've just engaged in a struggle which has altered their consciousness and made them feel more empowered. They recognize that: alright this is limited, I need to go further. Where do they go? Do they go straight into a revolutionary organization? Maybe, maybe not. So the intermediate level can serve as a space where people can develop themselves further as they're going along that process and trying to figure themselves out.

Now the revolutionary level, right, is, it's a level where, when we say it's a "high" level, it doesn't mean that it's in a hierarchy above the mass level. It's simply that the level of unity required to exist within a revolutionary organization is usually higher. So people who are in revolutionary organizations tend to be on an ideological level, on a theoretical level, on a strategic level, and usually on a tactical level. So that's the people we're talking about. But again, in that revolutionary level, you're gonna have a variety of tendencies, you're gonna have anarchists, you're gonna have, you know, socialists, you're going to have all types of different groups. So that's what the revolutionary level is referring to. It

just refers to that higher kind of level of commitment to coherent theoretical positions, coherent strategic positions and tactical coordination.

Ok. Now when it comes to the revolutionary level, the revolutionary level is going to try to push for these kind of longer term goals. So for the revolutionary level, it's important that we start looking again at this intermediary level in order to start to build towards that longer term struggle and start engaging folks in those conversations about not just the changes that we want today but the changes they'd like to see in the future. So the revolutionary level can meet within the same intermediary level organization. So what this is basically talking about is that as revolutionaries, right, the revolutionaries that may be of different tendencies may still be able to fight together, may still be able to work together at this intermediary level, where they would not be able to work together at the revolutionary level because of significant differences in the way that you -- how these social struggles should be formed; how the revolution should come about. So this becomes a space for that kind of activity to happen as well, which we think that is important, that is necessary. And that's something that, you know, needs to be happening amongst revolutionaries of different stripes.

Alright, so why is the intermediate level a strategic focus for our revolutionary tendency at this time? It goes back to this issue that there's this disconnect between long term and short term, right? There's a lot of disconnect between what revolutionaries are advocating for in the long term and then what's actually happening in the short term. We want to be able to bridge that gap, we want to be able to close that gap between our long term visions and how we operate and what we're doing at the short term level and mid term level.

Ok, now when we think about the intermediary level, the intermediary level can also serve as a kind of autonomous force within social movements, right, That can build mass level organizations or activate militants within the mass level or militants in mass organizations. So to kind of put that into more concrete terms: I'm a member of a union, right? My union, politically speaking, is very conservative, sometimes downright reactionary. So in that space, sometimes our activity is going to be quite limited because when we try to push for certain things in the union there could be very serious repercussions to our jobs, to our livelihood. So we may not be in the type of space where we can push for what we'd like to see in the midterm and the long term. But the intermediary level, can operate independently, from that mass organization while still engaging people at the mass level. So in my case, what I'm currently trying to work on as a teacher is: I'm a member of my union, right, I'm a member of my union because I feel like even though I feel like the union for the most part, the leadership is pretty whack, they suck, you know, they don't back us up; at the same time there's people who joined that union who want to fight. So I'm going to try to find those people and group up with those people so that together we can start building up a tendency and start pushing within our union and we can do this both within and outside of the union. So where the union is limited by, say, legal questions these autonomous organizations, if they're powerful enough, if they're large enough, can potentially either push those contradictions to the forefront, right, and show them to the union membership -- that ok, our union has these limits, we need to break beyond them -- or simply act where the union or where the mass level organization would not be able to act.

So part of the goal or purpose of the intermediary level is for us to be able to build connections to broaden the dialogue to become pretty much a force multiplier because we need to be able to do that if we hope anarchism to once again become a relevant ideology, a relevant you know a relevant approach to revolution. If we're not able to do that, if we're not able to broaden these conversations to become a force multiplier, we become disconnected and often times wither away and die out. So that's why that's relevant and important.

So at the intermediary level, activists and militants that we meet, um, we meet with them, we get to know them, we build relations, and we learn to struggle together. I think a big part of building mass movements and building this type of work is about building relations. So we always have to be conscious of how we build relationships with other militants. And again, I feel like if we are going to be able to attract working class people to anarchism again, it's critical that we build relationships over a period of time so that when struggles do erupt, when things start to heat up, people see us as

individuals who can be trusted, who are disciplined, who they can count on, and who they know are going to fight with them side by side when times get hard.

So in order for popular class movements, they're going to be those responsible for really making a social revolution, the revolutionary organization needs to be able to connect and engage with the mass level and the intermediary level. This is an important point. Without mass level work, without mass organizations, revolutionary organizations or intermediary organizations pretty much are useless. If we cannot connect, if we cannot build relations, if we cannot, you know, activate militants in these struggles, if we cannot help push for our points of view and also grow -- have our views grow alongside those who are actually engaged in struggle, we run the risk of becoming irrelevant. We run the risk of becoming, as it shows there, a head without a body, right? A theory group, a group that doesn't do much, talks a lot but doesn't get much done.

One thing to keep in mind is that these levels aren't static. So what is possible to a large extent will depend on what's happening at that current moment historically and we do have to keep that in mind. So again the intermediate level, the revolutionary level, and the mass level are always going to look different depending on where we're at historically, where the class struggle is at.

One thing we should do is try not to confuse the intermediary level for the mass level. Recognize that the intermediary level, we're talking about individuals who are starting to think more in the mid-term and long term, there are people who are actively involved in struggles, there are people who are looking to expand the struggles. They're starting to recognize the limitations of the mass organizations that they're involved with. So we shouldn't confuse that intermediary level for the mass level.

We have to also be careful with kind of becoming distracted by simply mobilizations, and starting to think that if we're able to mobilize lots of people we're actually doing something to build up the mass level, we may not be. And sometimes mass mobilizing can be very powerful but it can quickly disappear and we still have to ask ourselves what are we left with when that does happen. So we have to make sure that we're not just thinking in terms of mobilizations. This is not a question of numbers right, at least not only about numbers, it's a question about how are these mass struggles becoming more combative, how are they becoming radicalized? So a way that we find it useful to explain that distinction is massification vs. mobilization. And massification would be the kind of work that I'm talking about: which is deepening those struggles at the mass level and not just mobilizing a lot of people and having a lot of warm bodies, you know at a protest or at an event or something like that.

So what we'd like people to consider is how this relationship is supposed to work and what we're saying is that, the um, kind of again, the purpose is to get people who are at the intermediate level to work at the mass level right, so we identify folks who are at this intermediate level then we should be trying to work together to get involved at the mass level and in mass organizations. I come back to the example of the union that I gave earlier. Which is you know, I identify teachers who are disillusioned with the union, that are disillusioned with the way things are working. Um so we're going to go and try to fight within the union but we're also open to working outside of the union if necessary.

So for MAS we think that it's very important to try to get mass level militants to join the intermediary level or to kind of move up into that intermediary level and begin engaging other folks at the mass level, at the level of the mass organizations. Though, of course, the other one from intermediary to mass level is still important. So some examples of what we're talking about: workers networks, we see this often times in groups like IWW have played this role where there have been mass struggles at a particular workplace and for whatever reason, either because they were successful and they gained things or because the struggles were too prolonged, started falling out, but you still had folks who became radicalized through that process: what do you do with them? What can they do? So building up a network of militants across an industry, potentially, is one example of how that intermediary level might work. Again the teacher example I

gave earlier, taking teachers who are members of the union and then fighting with them both inside and outside with teachers who have become more politicized is another example of an intermediate level.

So in a nutshell, guys, the intermediate level for us is the strategic sight for struggles today because again, we're facing a time period where class struggle in the united states even though recently there has been resurgences, there has been what we might call "moments", we're not in the time where we have "movements" yet perhaps. And so I think we're still in that process of building. So the question of how we build them and how we participate in the building up of movements so that they maintain an independent autonomous character, so that they don't become simply co-opted by you know, bureaucratic forces. It's a critical question and this is the type of question that we're trying to grapple with and we think that building up this intermediate level to do work at the mass level is perhaps the most strategic work that revolutionaries and members of anarchist political organizations can be doing today.



Comments and Proposal on Analysis and Strategy

As part of the debates that followed the founding of Black Rose/Rosa Negra (BRRN) Anarchist Federation Pablo proposed the idea of an analysis and strategy committee to more systematically address analysis around race and white supremacy as well as develop a more unified analysis and strategic orientation as an organization. His intervention in the organization had an important influence on its direction, development and work of the Analysis and Strategy Committee proposed here, which continues on within the organization.

Hey compas,

I just wanted to get this out to the DC [Delegate Council]. We can discuss it at the next DC call since many ppl wont be able to read it before tonight's call. The reason why I'm putting it on here first is b/c I feel that an organization wide debate over the main listserve is untenable and probably undesirable. So, I think the best way to move this conversation fwd until we have the forums set up so that people can participate in organization wide debates is to do it through the delegates. The delegates will bring it to their groups, the groups will discuss the proposal, make amendments, etc. and after a period of 2-4 weeks a vote can be taken based on the original proposal and any amendments or counter proposals. I did want the delegates' feedback first, so please respond with any feedback to this post. The proposal is pasted below and also attached.

It seems to me that several critical issues have arisen during and since the formation of Black Rose Anarchist Federation. I see these as issues primarily arising from some unresolved ideological disagreement and a lack of strategy.

Even though I don't necessarily think of the ideological divide that exist between members of BR as some insurmountable chasm, there does appear to be at least some significant differences, such as how race and White supremacy are understood within the organization. I think that there should have been, and still needs to be, more discussion on such questions, but probably for various reason this didn't happen. It appears to me that part of the problem has to do with how such questions are approached amongst anarchist and other anti-statist revolutionaries in the U.S. It seems that here, because of the lack of autonomous mass organizations and social movements, a lot of our ideological positions are developed in the abstract, primarily from historical debates or historically high periods of the class struggle. While this is understandable to some extent considering where the class struggle is at in the U.S. today, doing so tends to lead to posturing or dogmatism over whose line is more correct with little to show as evidence except for some stale historical debates dashed with some very limited examples, whose influence is often overstated to make a

case for one's own side. I think we need to avoid such posturing or dogmatism at all cost, and be primarily theorizing from where we're at now.

There also seems to be a tendency amongst some Platformist or Especificista inspired militants and organizations in the U.S. to look towards organization as an end in itself. This is perhaps evident in the amount of energy and thought given to the form of BR [Black Rose], but not nearly as much to the content of our politics. Where political content was giving more consideration, it feels more like an afterthought. This is evident in the construction of our POU [Points of Unity], a document that reads more like a cutting and pasting job rather than a summary of discussions and debates on such questions within BR. I've recently begun to question the usefulness of POU's in general, especially when they're not the product of an organization wide discussion and debate, and where discussions of strategy and actual common work have not really taken place. Even if some want to argue that ample space was provided for such debates to happen, the fact that they didn't speaks to some sort of underlying issues with trying to create such an organization today. I think that we need to look at the type of organization(s) we create as a response to particular strategic needs of the class struggle and the struggle of the popular sectors. Now, how do we do that when there hasn't been any attempt to produce a systematic analysis of what the conditions are like on the ground (at least) in the U.S. today? I know that in MAS before we actually began organizing, we did an analysis of our local conditions (demographics, economy, social relations, organizational forces, etc); it's from that research that we developed our Program, which included things like the Intermediate Level Analysis. I think that as a political organization, we could be of real service to many revolutionaries in the U.S. if we could do this kind of research. More importantly, how are we as an organization to theorize, develop political lines, strategies, and tactics that correspond with our revolutionary aims without really having such information available?

It's my honest belief that if BR were to undertake such a research project, we could use the data to develop organizational strategies that would further clarify our unity and purpose as BR. I know that to some such a project might represent some sort of intellectualizing divorce from struggle. But in reality, it's an attempt to facilitate action and ensure that our actions as an organization are strategic and coordinated. Too often, anarchist specific organizations are an assortment of individuals working on separate and disparate projects. Individual militants organized based on need (e.g. workplace) or preferences. Locally based organizations may lack the technical know how or capacity (time, energy, etc.) to do such research. But as a national organization, we have an opportunity to undertake such work, and begin to craft an organizational strategy as well as political lines based on solid research of the historical, economic, and social conditions in the U.S. today. I see the lack of a Program, with clear strategies for how to effectively practice social insertion, as one of the critical missing components to BR's growth and flourishing. Without agreements on a strategic program, we're likely to get wrapped up in ideological debates that exaggerate our differences, rather than debates around strategy that emphasize our commonalities.

What I propose is that we form a committee to begin doing this research and organizing it into coherent categories and sections. This compilation and organizing should take about 3-4 month. Once compiled, it will be distributed to each local for study. We'll figure out a timeline for how long each chapter should have to read it and devise strategic proposals. Then, at the next convention, we could begin the process of adopting these strategic proposals. As part of this research, we should include a memberships survey to know what areas of struggle and/or types of employment our members are concentrated in.



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