

A history of Wild Rose Rebellion, 2007–2009

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Wild Rose Rebellion (WRR) was an anarchist group primarily based in Iowa City, Iowa. Its beginnings can be traced to late 2007, when anarchists involved in a local student antiwar group, infoshop and IWW branch decided they wanted to hold meetings to plan for the 2008 Republican National Convention protests in the Twin Cities.

While WRR was often not a cohesive organization, it brought together those who identified as anarchist or anti-authoritarian for work on various projects, events and campaigns. Although it should be noted there were not always clear boundaries between individual and collective projects.

In its second year WRR began to look at its focus and form. The group began a process to formalize the organization, its membership and decision making processes. This culminated in early 2010, with a new name, a shift in our fundamental focus toward class struggle and the creation of a constitution and mission toward that focus.

This piece is written for the purpose of informing new members of our past, as well as contributing to the unfortunately small recorded history of Iowa and Midwestern radical organizing. In addition to these primary aims, a critical view of what WRR was and our actions is a goal. This is based on the reflections of a couple people. The few dozen others who at one time or another were involved to varying degrees with WRR may see things differently. We welcome them to write replies or their own accounts.

Pre-Wild Rose Rebellion (2006-late 2007)

In 2006–2007, although there were a number of anarchists and anti-authoritarians in Iowa City, there existed no self-identified group. The most visible things people were involved in were the University of Iowa Antiwar Committee (UIAC), the Velocipede Infoshop, Arthink (a radical art collective) an IWW local and Food Not Bombs.

The UIAC was arguably the more successful of the 5, as anarchists played a major role alongside Trotskyists and liberals in the group and its activities. The UIAC was the largest Iowa City leftist group in recent memory and its protests, sit-ins, educational events and presence were an entry point for many people. It existed from 2002 until 2009, when its slow demise (reflective of the national antiwar movement) became complete and it ceased to operate.¹

Velocipede Infoshop began as a mostly anarchist/anti-authoritarian book, zine and pamphlet shop, operating on a collective basis, from November 2006 and until July 2007. The infoshop also facilitated a meeting space for some local groups and workshops, and was a semi-regular music venue for benefit and non-benefit shows.

There were many factors in this project's demise. It was located in the Hall Mall; relatively inaccessible for a few reasons, it is an office hallway accessed by way of a steep flight of concrete stairs, and for many has a negative reputation from the businesses and those who frequent them.² There were different ideas for the use of the space, differing levels of commitment from

¹ One of the more interesting aspects of the UIAC was that, although it was a university registered and funded student group, it was founded by a majority of faculty and non-student members, and always had a mixture of these two groups and students. This is outside our scope, but it would be interesting to take a serious look at how the demographics played into group dynamics, decisions and direction, as they seemed irregular when compared to the wider, now almost defunct, movement.

² Included was a shop owned by a known sex offender, Ray "Stingray" Parrish, and many within and outside of the infoshop collective described the environment of the Hall Mall as unsafe.

those involved, and some interpersonal conflicts over substance dependency among one member. These issues were combined with the continual loss of people involved from moving away or simply checking out, ultimately leading to the infoshop's end.

Arthink was a loose art collective made up of "conscious artistic people who gather to collaborate on creatively addressing political, social, and environmental problems." They drew from artists such as Banksy, Shepard Fairey, and 1960s radical posters, among others.

An Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) group was first started in spring 2006, meeting in Iowa City as an Eastern Iowa IWW group. This group brought together a handful of IWW members from the central eastern Iowa region. There were a couple of attempts at workplace organizing with members involved, one at an area private college among cafeteria workers, another at a warehouse.³ Ultimately these organizing attempts were unsuccessful, and those involved in each campaign moved from the area. Even with these members, there was a continual failure to maintain the 10 regular dues paying members required to establish a local branch.

By late 2007 the remaining IWW members were facing the realization that with very few people involved, and no connection to actual organizing campaigns, even in a supportive role, the purpose was questionable and they ceased to meet.

Iowans Against the RNC! and the Beginnings of Wild Rose Rebellion (Late 2007-Mid 2008)

After the announcement that the 2008 Republican National Convention would be held in the Twin Cities, there was a flurry of activity in the Midwest in response. The RNC Welcoming Committee and Unconventional Action were formed. The former was a Twin Cities based group that aimed to act as an information clearinghouse to aid those who wanted to do street blockades to disrupt the convention. The latter was a loose network that attempted to direct individuals and groups to these actions at both the RNC and the Democratic National Convention in Denver.

Call-outs to participate and announcements for spokescouncils were circulated and a few Iowa City anarchists decided to plug in, attending planning sessions in the Twin Cities, making contacts with people at the 'Caucus of the Future'⁴ and circulating an invitation to start an Iowa-wide network to participate in the RNC protests.

The initial meeting in Iowa City was held in December 2007. Although the preliminary names of both the group (Iowans Against the RNC!) and meetings (RNC Consulta 1, 2, 3, etc) were reflective of the original intentions as an organizational body for protest mobilizations, it became clear early on that we had interests that went beyond this.

These sentiments were expressed through a variety of non-RNC related projects that many of us did or were a part of, such as Food Not Bombs, running a literature table at some events from the former infoshop's collection, a protest and disruption of Karl Rove's visit to the university, a fundraiser for the families & defendants of the Postville raid and participation in the Democracy Is Direct conference in Lawrence, Kansas. We also adopted the name Wild Rose Rebellion and began work on creating a points of unity draft.

³ These were Cornell College in Mt Vernon, and Worley's in Cedar Rapids, respectively.

⁴ The Caucus of the Future was a "counter-caucus" event in Des Moines, held on the same weekend as the Iowa Caucuses. It had a wide range of workshops dealing with topics such as the anti-globalization movement, Know Your Rights trainings, permaculture and the animal liberation movement, among others.

Karl Rove Protest and Disruption

In March of 2008, the University of Iowa Lecture Committee hosted former White House chief of staff Karl Rove at one of their events. A protest was planned and organized, primarily by the UIAC, although WRR tabled the event with pamphlets and zines, and worked with some Des Moines anarchists on a banner that was hung from the parking ramp directly across from the speaker's venue.

Rove's discussion with the Lecture Committee host was interrupted numerous times by people heckling and shouting him down.⁵ A citizen's arrest was even attempted by members of Des Moines-based Catholic Worker. After the event a sympathetic worker at a restaurant tipped the UIAC off that Rove and his dinner guests were dining at their place of employment. We blocked most of the exits to the building and shouted at him with a bullhorn. In the end, his security detail had to whisk him out of there through the front door in a hurry, as attempts to go out the side and back doors were thwarted.

Postville Benefit and Protest

In May of 2008, the largest federal immigration raid conducted in United States history up to that point occurred at a meat processing plant in Postville, IA. We held a benefit in July at a local community venue with a raffle, prizes from local businesses, appetizers, and acoustic musical acts.

Over \$1000 was raised. This went to El Centro Latino Americano in Waterloo, a group that was handling the legal defense of those held by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, as well as supporting the families affected. Later that month many of us joined others from Iowa City in a trip to a large march in the small Iowan town of Postville, demonstrating solidarity with those affected by that heinous raid.⁶

Democracy Is Direct Conference

In May of 2008, a few of us traveled to Lawrence, Kansas to attend the Democracy Is Direct conference. The original purpose of the conference was to create a NEFAC⁷ style Midwest anarchist federation. A constitution, based largely on NEFAC's, but edited for the sensibilities of those suspicious of formal organization or from a green anarchist background, was circulated and a counter-proposal was written by a group of St. Louis-based anarchists that disagreed with the purpose and content of the constitution.

This conference brought together a number of anarchists from different tendencies in the Midwest and the discussion around the original proposal collapsed in favor of a possible merging of the federation style of organization and a network (a 'neteration'). There were also a number of workshops on topics such as the RNC protest preparation, the late Great Plains Anarchist Network, and indigenous land use struggles in South Dakota.

⁵ A video of his talk being disrupted can be found at www.youtube.com

⁶ Photos from the demonstration can be found at iowaindependent.com

⁷ North Eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists. See: www.nefac.net/

RNC Organizing

It was decided that we wanted to be a part of the street blockades and unpermitted marches that the RNC Welcoming Committee was facilitating, and our trainings and meetings revolved around this decision. We had movie showings on the 1999 Seattle WTO and 2004 Miami FTAA protests, had a thorough weekend-long street medic training, a direct action training and separated into affinity groups based on our interest (medic, legal, media, protesting, etc.). The goal was to have every person fully prepared of what the risks were and armed with knowledge of what to do and how to do it.

The RNC, a FBI Informant & Additional Projects (Mid 2008-Late 2008)

After nearly 10 months of preparation, the time came for us to travel to the Twin Cities. The experience there was hectic and eye opening. But it didn't end after we returned home. We eventually discovered that someone involved in our RNC efforts, as well as the UIAC, was acting as an informant for the FBI.

Despite these very all-consuming topics, we also spoke on a panel of community organizations at a social justice arts event, hosted regular 'bike in' movie showings, attended the second Midwest anarchist gathering, held an after-election event on voting, did a banner drop and issued a communique of solidarity, organized a clothing drive for the Pine Ridge reservation, and covered newspapers with a fake USA Today front page the day after the election.

The RNC

We arrived in the Twin Cities at an intense time. People we knew were being raided by the FBI and Homeland Security, helicopters were swirling overhead and police in riot gear seemed to be everywhere. It seemed at any moment, the possibility of being raided and detained existed, no matter one's plans for being in town.

While most of us went to work on the legal support, medical or media side of things, several of us had planned to meet up in the 'Midwestern Cluster' sector of unpermitted marches. This had been decided on for months. But, unknown to us, a student antiwar organizer had corralled up around 30 Iowa City people to travel to the RNC. From our conversations with these folks, we discovered they had no idea what they were getting themselves into, with many believing they were going to be on the major, safe and permitted march.

With this in mind, along with our opinion that some of the 'leaders' in the Campus Antiwar Network (CAN) were being reckless, if not dishonest, with inexperienced Iowa City people's trust, we switched to the CAN sector with the intention of not allowing fellow Iowans to be used as what amounted to cannon fodder. This was eventually resolved, with those who wanted to attend the larger, permitted march doing so, and those who were interested in the street blockades getting a crash course on what to expect.

By the end of the weekend, almost no Iowa City people had been arrested or hurt and all eventually returned safely.

Hurricane Season Appearance

In late September WRR was invited to join a panel with two other community organizations, speaking on our mission and activity. This event was called “Hurricane Season,” and was a multi-media theatrical piece on the effects of Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf States, and environmental destruction, racism and poverty more generally. The other organizations represented on a short panel at the end of this event were the Women’s Resource and Action Center of the university, and Food Not Lawns/Backyard Abundance, a community gardening organization.

Newspaper Wraps & Anti-Electoral Event

Through those we knew from RNC organizing we received a ‘newspaper wrap’ of a fake USA Today front page and inside cover detailing objections to capitalism and the state from an anarchist standpoint. This was placed on a number of display copies in newspaper dispensers around the city throughout the day after the elections.⁸

That evening we held an event named ‘Does Your Vote Count?’, which featured clips from documentaries on voter fraud in the 2000 and 2004 elections. A focused discussion on what the electoral system can actually offer followed.

FBI Informant

In late November, some of us in Iowa City received unedited FBI documents from people in the Twin Cities indicating there was an informant in the group. These documents detailed people’s names, occupations, addresses, previous political activity and plans for the RNC, among other things. Through process of elimination and identifying and attributing statements in the documents, we came to the conclusion that the informant was Jason Munford.

Jason Munford, who also went by Valvilis Cormaeril, claimed he was a conscientious objector from the Air Force and became involved in UIAC. Because WRR was the only group in Iowa City preparing and planning for the RNC, and the UIAC was mostly non-existent during the summer of 2008, he became involved in our group. Unknown to us, he was a paid informant for the FBI and acted in this role until at least November of 2008.

Once it was established that the informant was Jason, we confronted him at his workplace and went with our information to the UIAC, who promptly kicked him out of the group. Of course, he initially denied everything. When there seemed to him to be proof, he created a story about him acting as an informant to try and discover a never proven or identified second informant, in order to tell us. Eventually, he admitted it through a series of Facebook messages with individuals from UIAC and WRR, justifying it for a number of reasons.

UIAC and WRR put out a joint statement,⁹ exposing Jason, which was posted to various anarchist and radical news websites. He seemed to have disappeared soon after that, although he has resurfaced recently in Port Townsend, WA, on the heels of Port of Olympia civil disobedience actions against the Iraq War, working at a community space called the Boiler Room and involved in something called ‘Poetry Scream’.¹⁰

⁸ news.infoshop.org

⁹ The original statement, along with pictures can be found at twincities.indymedia.org

¹⁰ poeticscream.wordpress.com

Prairie Fire Gathering

The second meeting held for the Midwest anarchist ‘neteration,’ initially proposed at the Democracy Is Direct conference in Lawrence, Kansas, was called ‘Prairie Fire’ and took place in Oklahoma City. While a few workshops and group discussions took place, the prospects of any sort of intentional network seemed unlikely owing to the number of people with vague or developed notions of anti-formal organization sentiment.

Greece Banner Drop and Communique

During the Greek insurrection and unrest of 2008, an international call for solidarity was issued. Across the world there were a number of actions around this. A couple of us made a contribution through a banner drop on a busy intersection in Iowa City and issuing a communiqué of solidarity.¹¹

Pine Ridge Clothing Drive

In response to a request of support from people of the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, we collected and donated one large box of winter clothes during record-level blizzard conditions in late 2008.

May Day, Media & Last Projects (Early 2009-Mid 2009)

With the RNC over and the group still existing, we began to become more heavily involved in local projects, while trying to figure out what exactly we wanted to do. Meanwhile, unwanted media attention jolted us, centered on the FBI’s infiltration of WRR.

May Day

Although in recent years, May Day had been celebrated in Iowa City, in 2008 nothing was put on, and so WRR took the initiative of starting a group, the May Day Organizing Committee (MDOC)¹², in order to organize this. MDOC was formed primarily to bring the different organizations to the table in a fair way. In the past, there had been some amount of tension between student groups and non-profits over what a May Day event should look like, leading to feelings of tokenization on the part of the immigrant non-profits or condescension on the part of the student groups. Another intention of MDOC was to re-center May Day on workers and immigrants, something the most recent May Day in Iowa City had strayed from in favor of antiwar topics.¹³

People from WRR, UIAC, and AFSCME, along with other individuals put a lot of work into this, and on May Day, we attracted hundreds of people downtown. This May Day event of 2009 was

¹¹ The communique can be found at: anarchistnews.org

¹² 2009 May Day Organizing Committee website: www.maydayic.wordpress.com

¹³ We, unfortunately, made few, if any links with the Latino or immigrant community. Partially because few of us were around or from that community in Iowa City, but other reasons voiced were because many of the immigration groups from 2006 no longer existed or were lying low in an election year (encouraging their members or constituents to do the same.)

12 hours long, and featured 9 speakers and 3 bands, along with free Mexican food, kid's games, two workshops on racism and anti-immigrant movements and numerous groups tabling.

RNC 8 Benefit Show

In order to support the RNC 8's¹⁴ defense, we put on a house show that raised around \$300 for the fund on Valentine's Day.

Community Garden Effort

At a public housing area, an effort was made to assist those interested in starting a community garden. Actual WRR involvement ended up being low, as well as the interest of the people in the neighborhood. One garden was started, though.

Earth First! Roadshow

We hosted the Earth First! Roadshow at a small performance space in May. The presentation consisted of Green Scare updates, an introduction to ecological devastation, a call out for involvement and support of the EF! movement, and a puppet show on security culture. This was the last public event that WRR put on, as serious attrition and burn-out began to take its toll.

Prairie Fire Meeting

The third meeting of what by this point was intermittently termed Prairie Fire, happened in Kansas City, Kansas at the Crossroads Infoshop in June. This ended up being quite disorganized, with no agenda and people making serious proposals that the meeting consist of a 'big hang-out'. The large group discussions around creating something out of these meetings was more heated than the previous two, with very vocal minorities of formal and anti-formal organization partisans arguing with each other while the majority kept mostly silent.

While some of the WRRers who attended were energized from meeting other anarchists, others were thoroughly disillusioned with the process and politics of the majority of the attendees. It seemed fairly certain that no type of structured Midwest network or meeting of any kind was going to come out of these loose gatherings.

John Deng Murder

In July of 2009, a homeless Sudanese man named John Deng was shot and killed by a plainclothes Johnson County Sheriff's Deputy following an altercation with a middle aged white man who had just exited a bar and started a conflict with Deng.¹⁵

There was considerable controversy among the broad left in Iowa City and a university professor held a community forum that was intended to be the initiation of a group against police brutality. Unfortunately, this forum ended up being a recuperation of rage into tame avenues. After numerous accounts of police profiling and harassment from African and black Iowa Citians

¹⁴ RNC 8 were individuals mostly involved in the RNC-WC that were arrested on conspiracy charges with a terrorism enhancement for their role. See: www.rnc8.org

¹⁵ For a short summary of the situation, see: www.dailyiowan.com

were heard from the audience, it was decided we were going to walk to the police station to demand answers. The vast majority of the crowd waited outside while a couple of others negotiated with the police to provide a spokesperson. This was granted and the crowd was allowed into the city council's room.

What proceeded was a grilling of the police spokesperson on a number of issues, such as the police's relationship to the immigrants, blacks and Latinos of Iowa City, as well as the youth. The entire time, the university professor interrupted the crowd, rephrased and generally framed comments in a tone and manner that was more palatable to the police spokesperson and disrespectful of the crowd. The solutions offered were electing more accountable city council members and running for the absolutely powerless Police Citizens Review Board, a city-created body that could only make non-binding recommendations to the City Council, who then could make them to the police.

There was a desire from some in WRR to come up with a strategy for these forums to combat the efforts of reformists that were making sure anything the community did was inconsequential. But at the time, the group was in no position to take on such a thing due to disorganization and differences in politics. A concern stated by others in the group was that WRR members have an "outsider" identity to the communities affected by local police practices. It was also the case that the follow up meetings that were to have happened for the intended community group against police brutality never did.

Attrition and the Struggle to Reorganize (Mid 2009-Late 2009)

Throughout 2009, a number of people very involved in WRR moved from the Iowa City area. Many of these people graduated from or dropped out of college, some left for jobs or interests that took them elsewhere in the country, and some left the group for personal reasons. The fact that our meetings were becoming increasingly more frustrating as our attempts to reorganize stretched on was probably a contributing factor for some as well.

While we struggled with fundamental questions of purpose, structure and strategy, we also linked up with other regional anarchist or anti-authoritarian groups for the Midwest Joint Work project and participated in an antifascist action that disrupted an event by notorious Holocaust denier, David Irving. Eventually, WRR ceased to exist as a group, and a new one was started that differed in many aspects.

Male Accountability Group

Responding to the critiques of female-bodied and women members over a male dominated dynamic to WRR, we formed a discussion group to address sexism and patriarchy within the group in early 2009.

As with many things described here, this was not clearly defined or evaluated, during or after. As such, the real effects of this attempt are debatable. One may observe that, at the least, it began a conversation to confront personal and group attitudes that had previously existed unchecked.

Reorganization Attempts

In May 2009 we began to discuss ways of strengthening WRR, including a formalized decision process, dues and membership structures, and group positions. Most of this was ratified through our existing consensus process by late summer and early fall, though it should be noted that even with that approval many aspects of these procedures lacked clarity or consistent follow through.

Decreasing Numbers

Similar to countless other college towns, Iowa City has a high turnover rate of residents. Many people come here to attend the university for 2, 4 or 6 years. Others move here for the culture, employment or its perceived welcoming atmosphere towards LGBTQ folk.

Every radical group here, whether it was SDS,¹⁶ ISO,¹⁷ or WRR has to deal with people leaving. Where once there had been 10–15 people regularly attending our biweekly meetings, they started to decline to 5–8.

Midwest Joint Work

During the Revolutionary Work in Our Times¹⁸ conference, a side meeting, outside the conference, was suggested by a few Midwestern anarchist/anti-authoritarian organizations and we received an invitation. As a synthesis group, where the other groups invited were not, we heard several fair critiques of WRR structure and activity and we came back with a better perspective of what we wanted for our direction.

David Irving Disruption

In October of 2009, anarchists and radicals in Iowa learned that David Irving, a much discredited “historian” specializing in speaking to fascist and white power groups about his theories on the Holocaust and glorification of the German National Socialists, was planning an event in Des Moines. We linked up with allies and friends in Des Moines, and others from Iowa City, and disrupted his sparsely attended speaking engagement.¹⁹

The End of WRR

The group was down to a few people and tried to balance what we were with where we seemed to be heading. That is, a group with public, open meetings and a synthesis of radical left ideologies to one with closed meetings, and organized as a membership-based, specific anarchist group.²⁰

¹⁶ Back in the 60's and 70's, Students For a Democratic Society had numerous chapters in Iowa, its most well known probably in Iowa City.

¹⁷ The International Socialist Organizations used to be nearly 50 strong in Iowa City around 2003–2004. Although a chapter still exists, it only recently reformed with a small number after some years of non-existence.

¹⁸ The RWIOT conference was started as and exists partially as a regroupment and refoundation effort between various socialist groups. The politics of the groups who put the conference on could be described as Trotskyist, social democratic or ‘soft-Maoism’, although some of the groups have former anarchists (Love & Rage) as members. There is heavy attendance from those in progressive non-profits.

¹⁹ A communique was written and circulated which can be found here: news.infoshop.org

²⁰ ‘Specific Anarchist Group’ is used here to mean an organization that has come to conclusions similar to the Platformists, Especifists and dual organization syndicalists. It's a blanket term to include all three.

This created awkward moments, like having internal education portions of the meeting with people that had just walked into our public meetings, resulting in Anarchism 101 for one or two people.

Some of us finally pushed for having closed meetings and no new members until we came up with what we wanted to do. Over a few months we created and passed a constitution, revising and clarifying the dues structure, and creating new membership requirements, rotating positions of responsibility, and a statement of purpose & principles. Finally, we dropped the Rebellion part of our name and replaced it with Collective, in order to indicate that we were a different organization. We still exist one year later, far more stable and still involved in doing work in our area.

Re-emergence in the Media (Late 2010)

Around the time it was discovered that Jason Munford was a paid informant, a prominent former student antiwar activist filed Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA, requests with the FBI. Separately, a WRR member did likewise. Nearly two years later, over a thousand pages were received on various, mostly anarchist centered activity in Iowa from 2003–2008, and nearly 350 pages was solely on Wild Rose Rebellion.

While the information detailed in the FOIA was not particularly new or shocking, it did reveal the depth of surveillance which many of us were subjected to, and local law enforcement's role in working with federal agents (something previously denied by the City Council of Iowa City).

Despite not having consent from any former WRR members, the former student antiwar activist released the FOIA pages to the media and made himself available for interviews with anyone who was interested. In this exposure, he calls the FBI 'unamerican', appeals to the founding fathers, advocates non-violent civil disobedience as the solution and pushes various liberal causes such as single-payer health care, among other things.

The writers of this piece strongly disagree with this former student antiwar activist's behavior and views. Whether intended or not, he has gone ahead with things under his own agenda, despite his limited role in the activities described and has acted as an unofficial spokesperson for a now defunct group. Although people involved in WRR had many different outlooks and tendencies, pacifist liberalism was not one of them and he does not speak for anyone but himself. Some of us were compelled to write our own editorial to more accurately reflect what took place and the positions of those of us who were under federal surveillance.²¹

With that said, the release of the FOIA received a large amount of coverage in Iowa, appearing on the front page of most of the major newspapers, with follow-ups and editorials addressing the information in most of them in the following weeks.

Summary/Conclusions

Nearly a year has passed since WRR ended and we've had this time to reflect on our experience. When finally committed to paper, it seems that we did quite a lot for what we were. We existed as a place for anarchists, anti-authoritarians and those who sympathized to get together and take

²¹ Some former WRR members wrote an editorial that can be found at www.dailiowan.com

on projects. For some of us, the first meeting we attended was also the first time we ever met other anarchists, or even people who described their politics as radical.

Very few experiences are all ‘bad’ or all ‘good’, and our experience with WRR was no different. There were a number of positive and negative outcomes from what we did, and both can and should be learned from. Some of them have to do with gaining knowledge and skills about what to do and what not to do.

The experience and know-how we gained on things such as dealing with repression and infiltration were invaluable. Although not perfect, we tried to handle it the best we could, making sure those directly affected had the most say in any decision that pertained to the situation. Unlike other groups or ‘radical communities’, the FBI informant fiasco didn’t have a destructive, paranoid impact on us or what we did. The negative aspects that did or still affect people, such as psychological fear or emotional pain, are by no means unimportant, but probably incredibly difficult to address at the time (or even now).

Being able to put on and organize events, speaking panels, May Day celebrations, protests, fundraisers and carpools sanely, efficiently and painlessly is notable. These are vital, but sometimes, overlooked skills and we gained them through our involvement in WRR.

Through our experience with the Prairie Fire gatherings, we learned that self-identifying as anarchist isn’t enough to form the basis for actual work, much less being in the same organization, group or network. Anarchist is almost as broad of a word as leftist and can describe multiple, even contradictory and conflicting, outlooks. While this does not mean we can’t support each other or even come together on work that makes sense, it is pointless to try and force false unity.

Generally speaking, we were like a thousand other anarchist groups that have popped up over who knows how many years. We were inexperienced with no one to help guide us or even give us constructive criticism or advice. For the most part, anarchism in the United States is not an inter-generational thing. The people who tried and failed using the exact same tactics and forms of organization and doing the same projects aren’t around to let you know. The feeling that you’re doing something new is ever present, when actually it is far from true. This is something that feeds into itself. Older and experienced people drop out because what anarchists are doing is irrelevant to their lives. Anarchists, in turn, continue to be irrelevant and fail to learn because the older militants aren’t around.

Doing things just to do them is an undesirable ideology in itself. While it may feel good to fashion yourself as if you’re part of an ‘action faction’, the continuous replication of one-off events with vague or little purpose or strategy leads to burn-out and disillusionment. Just because you have a flurry of activity going on does not mean that activity is contributing more than what a small handful of projects or campaigns that are slower to create and build up would. This is partially due to the mindset and expectations of being an ‘activist’ as in the emphasis placed on the mobilization of people or spreading awareness through various public events. Left out of this are the day-to-day struggles, personal relationships and a critical look at the sustainability of your activity. Quality is often better than quantity.

And lastly, while some of us were involved in wider groups (such as the UIAC) or emerging movements (around the John Deng tragedy), this was mostly done in individual capacity. This was a mistake. While the writers of this piece do not believe we should have been some sort of Trotskyist or Maoist entryist caricature, simply coming to an agreement that we would combat efforts at recuperation, while advocating for directly democratic decision making and pushing for more radical solutions would have possibly made a difference in many cases.

All in all, we gained experience and skills, while making many errors and mistakes. But in the end, some of us were able to learn from them and make an attempt to correct them. Hopefully this piece helps others avoid reproducing what we went through, and instead assists them in building from it, whether it is the group just emerging in a Midwestern small town currently or the one emerging 10 years from now.

Some of those in the process of forming WRR attended. The original website is down, but this blog has a reposting of the description: iowastuff.tribe.net

The Anarchist Library

Anti-Copyright



Juan Conatz and R. Spourgítis
A history of Wild Rose Rebellion, 2007–2009
January 26, 2011

Retrieved on 10th December 2021 from libcom.org

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