

# The RSL is Dead

Long Live the RSL

Keith Preston

1990

## “Anarchist” Newspaper Planned

On November 24–25, 1989 I attended the Continental Anarchist Newspaper Conference in Chicago. Originally, I was a very enthusiastic supporter of this project and still endorse the concept of a continental anarchist newspaper.

However, after attending this particular conference, I have serious doubts as to whether the newspaper launched in Chicago over Thanksgiving weekend is the sort of publication that should serve as any sort of organ for the North American Anarchist movement.

Furthermore, a number of very disturbing events transpired which I believe merit considerable attention and discussion within our movement.

Upon arriving at the conference site, I witnessed the end of a fraction meeting involving members of the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL) who had just voted to disband their organization. I knew beforehand that the RSL was to be a significant contributor to the newspaper project.

The RSL, a former Trotskyist sect, has taken some bizarre positions in the past such as supporting an independent black nationalist state in the southern portion of the United States, and support for the government of Libya—definitely non-anarchist positions if ever there were any. Nonetheless, I was willing to accept at face value the RSL’s current denunciations of Marxist-Leninist ideology and supported their involvement in the project as one of many anarchist groups who were to participate.

However, as the conference began and the delegates introduced themselves, no less than twenty of the forty-seven people in attendance described themselves as former members of the RSL. Considering that another four were from the Revolutionary Anarchist Bowling League (RABL) of Minneapolis, oriented toward street fighting with the police, and at least five were associated with Hayday Anarchists of Chicago, the host group, it was apparent that the majority of the delegates represented three organizations which are known to be in close ideological affinity and collaboration with one another.

## Voting as a Bloc

Soon it became obvious that these groups were more or less voting as a bloc on all major decisions. The process being used was that of consensus where possible, otherwise simple majority. It was pointed out that RSL, RABL, and Hayday obviously had enough votes for a substantial majority and that process should be amended where a three-quarters vote would be required for all major decisions. This proposal was, of course, rejected leaving way for RSL, RABL and Hayday to dominate the entire conference

The entire first day of the conference was devoted to the writing of a statement of principles. What should have taken less than an hour ended up dragging on until 11:00 in the evening. The resulting statement was actually

more of a leftist manifesto and discusses everything but anarchism. Nothing is included concerning the principles of anarchism, the kind of society we hope to build or the means by which we hope to reach our goals.

There are a grand total of about four sentences which mention the state, capitalism and the need for workers' struggles as a class. However, there are lengthy statements about racism, sexism and imperialism including references to the "special" oppression of African-Americans and the "unique" oppression of youth. How the oppression of African-Americans and youth is any more special or unique than the oppression of women, gays and lesbians, old people, the physically challenged, left-handed people, etc., completely escapes me.

As for the structure of the proposed newspaper, it seemed as though it was decided beforehand that the production center would be located in the RSL's former office in New York with Chris G. of RABL as a paid "facilitator." The voting process on these issues amounted to Politburo rubber-stamping of already arrived at decisions. Chris G. was constantly being referred to as the newspaper's facilitator even before he was elected to that position.

A proposal was also introduced which would require members of the Editorial Council to affirm a commitment to the statement of principles, i.e., to impose a party-line on the newspaper. The proposal overwhelmingly passed and those of us who voted against it (those who did not belong to RSL, RABL and Hayday) were then asked to explain our objections. My position was simply that a newspaper which professes to be the continental paper of the anarchist movement should be open to all individuals, groups and tendencies who advocate a stateless, non-authoritarian society in which individuals have control over their own lives and workers have control over their own labor without requiring anyone to adhere to a pre-packaged manifesto drawn up by a handful of people at a single conference.

## **"Dinosaur Lips"**

When it came time to choose a name for the paper suggested titles included "Dinosaur Lips" (because it is non-political), "KAOS" (because "chaos is good"), "TRASH" and "Fucking A." The name eventually chosen was "Love and Rage," which seems more like an appropriate name for a heavy-metal band than a serious anarchist newspaper.

I finally walked out of the conference as nominations were being taken for the Editorial Council as it was apparent that RABL, RSL and Hayday planned to pack the council with their members.

A continental anarchist paper is a valid and necessary concept. However, such a project should be inclusive of all tendencies, groups and individuals within our movement with equal access to the decision-making process for everyone. The newspaper project launched in Chicago is nothing more than the latest RSL project, in collaboration with RABL and Hayday. Most disturbing of all are the obvious exclusionary, vanguardist methods employed by these three groups during the conference.

As an anarchist, I encourage discussion and thought regarding these matters among all serious people within our movement.

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