

Revolution is an Act of Love

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There is a phrase which has often come to mind in the last few months of our movement—"the politics of proving." Too many people (especially whites, and particularly white males) seem involved in a game in which the intent is to "prove that I am as revolutionary as the blacks, the Cubans, the Vietnamese." Most recently, "as revolutionary as the Black Panthers."

It was submerged in the movement for a long time, but it certainly became explicit at the time of the October 1967 demonstration at the Pentagon. There were those in the action who wanted to prove their revolutionary militancy by carrying the flag of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam and (like the Committee to Aid the National Liberation Front) thought that the best way to furnish proof was by trying to provoke a confrontation with the troops and federal marshals which would have resulted in a tear-gas volley that would have probably turned a determined mass of demonstrators into a panicked and deathly rout down the stairs of the Cathedral of American Imperialism.

There were others who could only talk afterwards about "how we had proved to blacks that white radicals would fight, too."

Socialism is not about trying to "prove" one's manhood in terms of bourgeois images of warriors and domination. Socialism is about the discovery of and struggle for a new manhood and a new womanhood in which proving, warriors and domination become irrelevant relics of the 5,000 years of repressive-dominative civilization which it is our task to transcend.

Revolution is an act and process of love in which people become whole again because the possibility of reuniting love and action, passion and gentleness, human need and human possibility, become so integrally merged that there is nothing left to "prove."

There is only discovery, self-knowledge and the conviction that what one is doing is so much on-the-track that the new world has already begun to exist, that one is part of it, that there is no way to lose. We can't lose except by denying what we're about. We may very well die, but we will only experience death if we allow it to creep death-like into our minds, our bodies and our movement.

An anti-war GI who raised the question about building cut precisely to the core of the problems which face us.

We have gotten ourselves stuck in a dynamic of confronting symbols-and-agents of corporate-power on the one hand and then defending-the-victims-of-repression on the other. Demonstrations (symbolic or otherwise) plus defense committees have been the substance of our politics.

What have we built? Apart from defense committees and Leninist vanguards which are irrelevant to a movement in an advanced neo-capitalist society, we have not built the mediating structures of a new world. We have created the slogan "All Power To The People." We have not organized or catalyzed "People's Power."

Behind the alienated dramatics, the rhetorical poses and the tactical witnesses, lies our failure to build a revolutionary movement. It's the failure to have taken Marx seriously on the point of how "socialism grows out of the womb of capitalism."

It is the failure to recognize that even in the very different societies of the third world that guerrilla warfare is an organizing technique in catalyzing alternative institutions, alternative forms and bases of power. It is a failure to understand that Che Guevara was an organizer-catalyst operating in a particular social-historical context and who was important not because he was a “hero” (one of the earliest images of alienated manhood in repressive civilization) but being merged with the felt and frustrated needs of people with whom he needed and wanted to join.

He was a person who, however imperfectly, understood that socialist revolution is always “socialism from below”—and not in the sense of guilt by association. Socialist revolution is always a search for the historically possible alternatives of life and freedom, never a search for martyrdom.

Many will say, “Yes, but there is so much to destroy, there is so much repression, the enemy is so brutal.” There is only one answer which makes any sense: “Our task is not destruction but construction.” But, perhaps we still have a long way to go and a long row to hoe before we discover that our role is that of builders not of guilt-ridden, tragic figures who glory in their Samson-like stance among the present or potential ruins of the past.

This is not an argument for utopianism. It is an argument for the need and possibility of building those mass grass-roots structures of alternative forms of life and free human expression which are the only base out of which the revolution can grow—the revolution which does not need vanguards because it is so deeply grounded in the lives of the majority of people that the governing classes will have lost before they know what has happened to their power.

What will we build—hard-core cadres of isolated pseudo-revolutionary sects who spend the major part of their energies attacking those who do not mouth the correct liturgical phrases? Or will we build the revolution from below in which the masses of alienated people in this country translate their felt alienation into concrete structures and forms which begin to express the substance of a new kind of society and who, once they have discovered that class society and bourgeois rule are out of date, will move toward the final implementation of a new society?

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