

RED: Breaking Ground

RED Alert Manifesto

The Radical Education Department is an autonomous collective dedicated to the construction of a radical internationalist Left through the training and federation of its cultural warriors. We assert these principles to be the worthiest of being put to the test of collective mobilization:

- 1. Despite their insidious claims to independent neutrality, cultural and educational institutions serve to reproduce socio-economic hierarchies and constitute crucial battlefields for the perpetuation or transformation of relations of power.
- 2. The dominant educational system indoctrinates and dominates by
 - mis-educating the general public and imposing disempowering worldviews;
 - transforming individuals into vocational cogs in the capitalist apparatus;
 - stratifying the population through institutionalized class warfare, which is often rendered invisible via myths of meritocracy;
 - providing credentials and intellectual cover for worldwide capitalist oppression, as well as its technocratic, fascist, and racist apologists;
 - providing research and development for the lucrative business of war and ecological destruction;
 - privatizing knowledge and subjecting it to a competitive exchange economy; and

• purposely misdirecting intellectual labor power or hitching it to the wagon of academic bureaucracies and market imperatives.

It is therefore necessary to re-educate ourselves regarding its sordid histories, social functions, and contemporary struggles.

- 3. Wresting control over knowledge production from the corporate elite entails transforming extant institutions, producing counter-institutions, and engaging in radical modes of guerilla education and cultural training both within and beyond academic walls.
- 4. Struggles against the exploitation, bureaucratization, and vocationalization of academic labor are at the forefront of the battle over knowledge power.
- 5. Against the private property regimes imposed on knowledge production by capital and its bureaucratic administrators, the radicalization of education requires socializing and collectivizing both the process of producing knowledge and its products.
- 6. Transforming extant cultural and educational institutions necessitates direct actions that contest the policed hierarchies operative within them, not falling prey to the ideological traps set by fascists and their liberal apologists, if these be so-called civil discourse, fair and balanced debates, free speech or other such shibboleths for power.
- 7. Whereas the military-industrial-academic complex has militant capitalist elites lavishly funding research and development efforts for global warfare, reactionary think tanks and pseudo-intellectual ideologues, research collaboratives of and for the radical Left create communities of alternative education that seek to benefit all by providing verifiable-rather than ideological-accounts of history and social life around the globe, as well as mobilizing knowledge for egalitarian and emancipatory ends.

- 8. Part of the project of radical education is learning and teaching the long and deep histories of left struggles around the world, including those around education, particularly because these battles have often been banished from the historical record.
- 9. Recognizing the reactionaries' strategy of *divide and conquer*, the project of radicalizing education works to federate across struggles, including across the geographic and ideological span of the global Left, which positions itself, by definition, against capitalism.
- 10. These tactics must be mobilized for the overall strategy of constructing and strengthening an egalitarian, anticolonial, ecological, anti-patriarchal and internationalist Left.

We issue this RED alert as a wake-up call to the necessity of collectively re-educating ourselves and taking action to create another world, which is not only possible, but absolutely necessary!

-RD & ED, founding members of the Radical Education Department

Why RED, Why Now?

The Radical Education Department organically grew out of our orchestrated direct action campaign, as Nova Resistance, against the over-funded and over-securitized lecture by racist eugenicist Charles Murray at Villanova University in the spring of 2017 (click here to read a recent post about this action). However, its roots, for some of us, stretch back further to our activities at Occupy Philly, as well as our collective publishing of Occupy Philly: Machete. In what follows, I reflect on why we decided to launch RED in the summer of 2017.

I have always strongly believed in the importance of collective organizing and institution building in order to maximize our agency by working with others to construct platforms for the future. In my experiences organizing and founding various alternative institutions, however, I have also come to learn that many projects never get off of the ground because they are all too quickly ensnared in the bramble of petty debate. This can include such things as individuals being more invested in their subjective preoccupations than in collective action or-particularly in intellectual circles—the sophistication Olympics, in which pedantic posturing and problematization exercise their domineering, disheartening and imperial rule over anything practical, tactical or productive. When a group of us came together so seamlessly to contest the promotion of white supremacist misogyny and topdown class warfare on a conservative college campus, it struck me that we had the baseline of shared convictions that would allow us to move ahead productively with other projects.

Indeed, once we started sharing ideas, I became convinced that our modus operandi of diagonal or transversal organization was a powerful practical solution to other models I had encountered. In my experience, if the verticalism of a top-down chain of command can smother important ideas from below, the horizontalism à la Occupy can sometimes foster an endless plethora of ideas with little or no direction. Our decision to organize diagonally-by which I refer to our conviction, for instance, that a RED endeavor be defined as anything that at least two members agree on-meant that we could do away with a single leader without bottoming out in obligatory consensus. This form of organizing, which overlaps with some of what I had been trying to thematize in my writings and interviews on the Nuit Debout movement in France, has meant that we can work very efficiently and autonomously without needing to constantly meet to debate our next steps. It is an enormous boon, in this regard, that we are all on the same wavelength and trust one another due to our years of intermittently organizing together.

Since we are all currently involved with institutions of higher education, it made sense for us to do everything that we can where we are. The focus on education, however, I think we all understand in the broadest possible sense of the term (like the ancient Greek notion of paideia): it is the collective process of forging a collectivity, by mutually fashioning its thoughts, feelings. representations, values and worldviews. Moreover, since we are the bearers of myriad university credentials, I was very drawn to the idea that we could mobilize them in the name of radical social transformation. Instead of the anti-capitalist Left being affiliated by the propaganda machine with destitute, dirty and drug-induced dropouts, RED—whose most powerful symbol to date is a radical "dressed to teach" à la JPS confronting Murray—can send a very strong message about why we should all be on the hard Left. For if we spend years seriously studying the history of the modern world while cultivating intellectual autonomy from the ideological incarceration within capitalist thought factories, we will reach the same conclusion: another world is necessary!

This focus on education goes hand-in-hand with community building and the development of an autonomous pedagogical platform. In fact, in many ways, I understand RED as a collective process of self-education. In sharing our views with one another and a broader community, providing feedback on one another's projects, creatively brainstorming together, and so forth, we are collectively teaching one another through the direct action of productive theoretical and practical exchange. Rather than trying to make RED into an advertising campaign that simply garners as many votes as possible like a political party, I take it that we have founded an organization in the best sense of the term: an autonomous collective invested in self-education in order to foster a process of group social transformation. An organization, we might say, "takes the long way around" in the sense that it is invested in a deep and long process of autonomous pedagogical metamorphosis rather than in the "quick return" of a political party that multiplies its followers as hastily as possible through thoughtless bannerwaving and public relations campaigns.

There are also important conjunctural elements that contributed to the founding of RED. One of these is the paltry response of liberals—who exercise an unmerited monopoly over the term "the Left" in the United States—to the election of a white supremacist trust fund baby to the White House. One of the ways in which the system of pseudo-democracy works is by corralling the administered masses into camps and determining their struggles for them. In the U.S., this tussle is defined as one between liberals and conservatives, and there is very little inquiry into why these are purportedly the only two options. This is particularly important because both of these camps are defenders of imperial capitalism, and the major difference is in their public relations campaigns. If liberals want to keep the gloves on and conservatives take them off, they both agree that the world should continue to be unremittingly pummeled by top-down global class warfare.

In blindly accepting a marketing campaign intent on defining "resistance" as "opposition to Trump," liberals swallow—hook, line and sinker—the bait tendered to them by pseudo-democratic administered reality. They thereby contribute to the perpetuation of the very system that produced this trust fund baby *and so many others* that are intent on advancing the same basic project (the imperial record of the Clintonites, which includes Obama, has been well documented for anyone interested in examining it).

Meanwhile, any position to the left of liberalism is violently subjected to the *reductio ad Stalinum*, as if opposing an economic and political system that is fast destroying the conditions of possibility of life on planet Earth was a form of bloodthirsty terrorism. This "blackmail of the Gulag" also eradicates—or, at least, attempts to—the memory of any radical leftism irreducible to Stalinism, like the anarchist international, egalitarian Soviet social projects, the varieties of anti-colonial struggle, autonomous indigenous movements, radical ecological politics, and so forth. Unfortunately, however, the inter-generational assault on the academy, marked by the red and black purges of the McCarthy era (that have never really ended), has assured that the university serves its function of ideological social reproduction by being dominated by conservatives and liberals with little or no awareness of these histories.

In this setting, it has been particularly important for RED to launch a frontal assault on the ideological pillars of liberalism, insofar as they usually function in perfect harmony with the conservative perpetuation or intensification of global structures of oppression. Along with the sword of direct action, then, we have taken up the pen of intellectual guerilla warfare to systematically dismantle the pervasive but misguided practico-theoretical framework surrounding issues like free speech, direct action, violence and antifascism.

We are fully aware of the fact that pro-capitalist—and usually jingoist—liberalism has much broader support in the university and the mass media, which inevitably restricts our audience. Politics, however, is not a popularity contest or an advertising campaign, despite what we are taught to believe. It is most fundamentally about how a collectivity forges its own reality. And we, at RED, are invested in qualitative transformation, not simply in a numbers game that is another one of the baiting mechanisms of administered pseudo-democracy. Rather than reducing politics to pandering to the ideological masses, in order to guarantee that they get what the system tells them that they want, it should be about qualitative collective education and social transformation.

I think that I can safely speak for all of us at RED when I say that we are not simply opposed to the latest trust fund baby in the white house. What we reject is the system that produced him, and so many others, and will continue to produce them if it is not dismantled. As the etymology of the adjective "radical" suggests, the Radical Education Department seeks to go to the root of the current crises and take power into our own hands, rather than remaining within the comforting illusion that we just need to elect different members of the ruling class to administer reality to us.

Educate to Liberate: A Conversation with the Radical Education Department

Note from RED: This interview with RED originally appeared on **Cutting Class**. Our comrades at Cutting Class are assembling a series of interviews with groups that are part of radical struggles against and beyond the university. Find out more at cuttingclass.noblogs.org

Cutting Class: Over the next few days, we'll be publishing pieces to highlight the work of some of the groups participating in the Cutting Class counterinfo network. We hope this will provide some clarity on where our crews are coming from and how that affects the way we have organized this project.

We also hope that these interview questions can provide a template for other autonomous groups to distill a collective understanding of their context and projects. If your crew finds these questions useful, write up a summary of your conversations and send them our way as form of а introduction! Cutting Class can be your platform, and we'd love interview with your crew to publish an and start collaborating—not just around CC but also with any other projects that these introductions might incite!

Today's featured organization is RED (Radical Education Department), an autonomous collective based in Philadelphia.

Introduce your crew: what projects are some you working on, how long have you been around, where are you based, etc. etc.

RED: RED—the Radical Education Department—is based in Philadelphia and is made up of undergraduate and graduate students, contingent faculty, and full-time faculty. We grew out of "Nova Resistance," which was a collective that we hastily formed to plan a direct action in the spring of 2017 at Villanova University. We disrupted a talk by the eugenicist fake academic Charles Murray, who was invited on campus by a Koch front-group called the Matthew J. Ryan Center. We stormed the front of the event with a banner, chanted and yelled to disrupt the talk, and then (when we were taken out by security) created an impromptu, radical teach-in directly outside the event space's windows.

Footage of our direct action is embedded above. We also prepared a statement about the event, as well as a broader intervention aimed at reframing the "free speech" debate.

From there, the core of Nova Resistance decided to look beyond resistance on a single campus. We formed RED to help build and connect revolutionary struggles across various educational sites, as well as to add to the efforts of those developing tools to integrate antifascist resistance into a broader, positive project of socioeconomic transformation (our initial manifesto can be read here).

Our research and writing fights back against the liberal and conservative ideologies that demonize radical struggle, and we're aiming to cultivate connections between campus groups in order to spark broad, radical, multi-campus actions in the future. That kind of project—involving revolutionary, federated students, teachers, and campus workers—can be a powerful tool, especially when merged with off-campus movements.

CC: What are some challenges you've faced (internal or external)?

RED: The biggest challenge has been an extremely practical one: lack of time and energy. It takes a lot of time to be an organizer, and there's a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes: sending and responding to emails, posting to social media, coordinating with other groups, writing articles, providing feedback on work by others in the collective, etc. It can be extremely hard to find time to do all of this while also doing what's needed to keep up with family obligations and the mundane tasks of survival under neoliberal capitalism.

We've found a few ways to work around this issue.

- A "core" and "periphery": we've identified a few "core" members able to make more time and energy commitment than others. There should probably be at least two to three, to allow for "rotations" of key duties in case one of the "core" is swamped. But it's also crucial to keep things transparent—giving other trusted group members the chance to dive in whenever they can.
- Deadlines: It's often not easy to meet a deadline. But simply having deadlines (even when we fail to meet them) is crucial to helping keep the project moving forward.
- No shaming: Everyone is busy, and it is unproductive to start guilting people who are doing whatever they can. In our group, we all know that everyone has unique sets of constraints—some are parents, some are international students, others are in a tenure gauntlet, some are swamped in new graduate programs—and we are simply happy to have anyone contribute whatever they can, whenever they can.

CC: What do you think some of the major limits, and major, untapped possibilities for radical campus organizing are today? How can we address those limits and realize those possibilities?

RED: History shows how much power on-campus struggles can have—like in May '68 and in the massive 2007 uprising of Canadian students. And radical, on-campus struggles have exploded in recent years, especially anti-racist and anti-fascist movements. Now is the time to start thinking seriously about how to make connections across campuses and between campuses and the streets, all the while helping push things further left.

But whether they're on college campuses or beyond, radical groups are often deeply disconnected from one other, so that we're working without a common strategy. This doesn't just mean a fractured and weak Left. It also means we can't learn from the accumulated knowledge and experience each group carries within it.

Even when we do work together in larger groups, we tend to be in really unstable, "umbrella" movements (think of Occupy or largescale student marches) that fracture and disappear fairly quickly, especially when they're pressured by authorities or the state.

All this raises some key questions. On a particular campus, what are the best ways to break down the boundaries between the most radical students, faculty, and staff? How can we help build a durable, cohesive, and truly transformative movement across many campuses? How could that movement bridge on- and off-campus struggles?

People are answering these questions in some interesting and important ways—for example, *Cutting Class* is a model for how different groups can learn from each other and coordinate with one another.

But to help further provoke that conversation, here is a potential strategic framework designed to link and amplify radical leftist struggles on college campuses:

- Recruiting the most radical members from the most radical anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-patriarchy movements on campus into a smaller, preliminary, central "spokes council."
- From here, coordinating ways that the several groups involved can stand in radical solidarity with one another's groups. The council could, moreover, serve as a spur to push the relevant groups as far left as possible. (As the relevant groups in question become more consistently connected and coordinating, the central council should open itself to democratic control by the bodies involved).
- At the same time, this council would provide a basis to easily coordinate actions across campuses. As communications increase between radical campus groups, it becomes possible to generate highly coordinated, radical, multi-campus actions regularly With this council framework, we'd have a tool to more easily coordinate on-campus struggles with off-campus struggles by feminists, anti-racist movements, workers, etc.
- More than this, linking on- and off-campus movements could put some helpful resources in the hands of people outside the university who could use them (e.g., college printers, since some faculty get unlimited free printing; abundant meeting spaces; plenty of computer labs with internet access; places to hold conferences; etc. etc.)
- This strategy entails its own research engines (which would need to tap into the ideas of both on- and off-campus movements). We need research to:
 - Re-learn what worked, and what didn't, in previous movements

 Analyze the university system, and how it fits into the global capitalist system—to find "weak points" to attack

But again, this is just a suggestion that we hope will spur further discussion. The strategy we're proposing here could and should undoubtedly take on different forms in different circumstances. But the central feature is the establishment of strong, highly coordinated networks of allies invested in revolutionary leftist organizing.

CC: How does your project connect with/support radical movements in your city and beyond? Are there good relationships worth mentioning? Bad ones?

RED: Building connections locally and beyond—but especially in Philly—is a major focus for RED right now. We're something of a new group, so we're at the beginning of that project.

Still, in mid-March we're hosting an event at the anarchist, volunteer-run bookstore, the Wooden Shoe, on "Antifascist Education." Ania Loomba, who has been involved with the University of Pennsylvania's chapter of the Campus Antifascist Network, will participate, as will Kempster (Ghani) Songster, one of the co-founders of the Redemption Project. We're also creating an interview series with some of the most interesting radical groups in the Philly area that we can find (to appear soon). First up is an interview with someone in the Philadelphia chapter of the anarchist Black Rose/Rosa Negra federation. We are also in touch with activists who were targeted in the infamous MOVE bombing in West Philly.

Moreover, we're emphasizing the need for an *international* perspective, which is absolutely essential for understanding how capital works. One of our members connected with an activist in the recent Iranian protests—Rahman Bouzari, who just published a piece on the events in *Counterpunch*—and we'll be running an interview with him and other activists soon. We would like our platform to allow local, national and international struggles to be nested together so that it's clear that—even though we are based in Philadelphia—that our struggle is global.

CC: What are some short and long-term objectives your crew has been working towards?

RED: Based on what I've said above, I think there are a few key tasks for a radical, campus-based movement:

- Building leftist spokes-councils on college campuses, made up of members of the most radical feminist, worker, antiracist, etc. groups on campus and pushing campus life radically Left.
- Connecting those local, radical councils across campuses via direct, coordinated actions, speaking events, publications, and so on.
- Connecting those local councils to feminist, worker, antiracist, etc. movements off-campus: coordinating actions in solidarity with those movements; putting the resources of a college (printing, meeting spaces, etc.) in their hands, and so forth.

CC: What is your relationship to the rest of the campus left?

RED: We're still at the beginning stages of building the connections we need, and some of us are struggling with studying or teaching at conservative campuses (we've written about organizing in this kind of climate elsewhere). However, we are developing some interesting connections. One of our members has close ties with United Students Against Sweatshops, which can, we hope, be an ally in the future; and we're beginning to connect with the Campus Antifascist Network at the University of Pennsylvania. One of our members teaches at Graterford Prison and is connected to various activist network around prison abolition.

We still have a lot to do, but the work continues!

RED Year I: What Is Done and to Be Done

RED was founded approximately one year ago, and it has developed in myriad unforeseeable and exciting ways, while also confronting obstacles and limitations along the way. By providing an overview of what I consider to be our successes, as well as an outline of goals for the coming year, it is my hope that I can contribute to the autonomous process of collective education that is crucially important to the revolutionary Left. Just as we have learned and continue to learn from so many of the radical groups at work around the world, I hope that others can take inspiration from our model, and also help us reach our goals for RED Year II!

Doing Something with Nothing

The basis for RED's success to date is the recognition that you can make a significant political impact with limited resources and no monetary support. We have, since the very beginning, been a small group, and each person has contributed according the their abilities and what their time commitments allow. Everything has been extremely shoestring, but there is a common egalitarian energy and anti-capitalist drive that invigorates us to pick up the RED torch whenever we can find time. This means—and it was an important lesson for all of us to learn experientially—that *any* tiny group of a few people can dive in and get things moving. There is no need to wait around until the time is ripe, the revolution is on our doorstep or the Establishment pushes things too far. The time is now! In the coming year, it would be great if we could find a few more dedicated torchbearers. At times, we have been spread too thin, and it is important for our group to maintain a stable core, as well as concentric circles of dedicated, as well as more or less intermittent, collaborators. Some of our early members have had to step back for numerous reasons, but others are also stepping up. We look forward to integrating them into RED and building up our concentric circles of collaboration in the coming year!

A Focused Organization Not a Political Party

We knew from the very beginning that we did not want to develop a mass organization, and we conceive of our role more as a radical *groupuscule* that can push the envelope, work more flexibly and intervene incisively, while simultaneously working with and across other groups. Our mode of organization is neither strictly hierarchical, nor is it purely horizontal, as we discussed here. In order to maximize the autonomy of our members, we decided that RED activities would be those supported by at least two members, which does not require group consensus or a single leader.

As we develop, we would like to shore up and clarify our modes of organization based on our experiences thus far, and also in order to fine-tune our decision-making process. It is a delicate operation to move beyond the extremes of verticalism and horizontalism, and many of us are convinced that this is an extremely important tactical shift that needs to be further theorized and put into practice. Given our past experiences in various political groups and in Occupy, we recognize the enormous strengths of this transversal mode of organization and would like to be able, through experiential knowledge, to be able to model it for other groups, while also continuing to learn more about all of the interesting organizational models that are already in practice.

A Thinking Tank

As a revolutionary leftist organization, one of our projects has been to function as a research collaborative that collectively produces informative and insightful articles on contemporary politics and organizing. We have successfully forged collaborations with some of the most important venues for the radical intelligentsia and general public (such as *CounterPunch* and *Truthout*) as well as for activist communities (such as It's Going Down and Enough Is **Enough**), which has allowed our articles to circulate in much broader circles. The content that we have collectively produced has arguably had an impact in at least two ways. On the one hand, we have diagnosed and conceptually dismantled the standard liberal framework used to make sense of contemporary media debates on such things as violence, antifa, direct action and free speech. On the other hand, we have increasingly been invested in asking and providing responses to timely tactical questions of organizing, encouraging our readership to always be thinking about how we can move our actions to the next level (see our work on anti-ICE mobilization. radical struggle in Philadelphia, insurrectionary insurrectionary councilism. the campus, antifa on а conservative campus and popular-front antifa). It is very difficult to know how much of an impact these interventions have had, but they have at the very least been extremely helpful for our own political education, and they have led to a series of productive discussions and interviews (like our discussions of revolutionary strategy on *IGD* and on violence and antifa on KPFA).

In the coming year, we would like to continue doing this kind of writing, while also adding additional fronts of struggle and connecting to new publication venues and audiences across the hard Left. Our recent launching of a zine project has successfully brought together significant voices on timely issues, and we would like to continue to develop our zines, which will include printing and distributing them free of charge. We have also begun discussing the possibility of launching RED press with short booklets, and many of us are invested in the long-term project of seizing the means of intellectual and cultural production. In this regard, we would also like to develop the aesthetic contributions to RED by collaborating more with artists and creative cultural producers, which will also allow us to reach different types of audiences

Revolutionary Coalition Building

RED is not committed to a single party line, and most of us would identify—or identified—as anarchists. communists be or revolutionary socialists (or some combination thereof). This has allowed us to work broadly with numerous other groups in order to avoid the siloing that has sometimes plagued the revolutionary Left. Some of our most successful public events have brought together people who work with various different groups in order to share their experiences and brainstorm about the most productive models for future collective work. We have also enjoyed the opportunity to serve as a platform for activists around the world, and we have developed ties over time with like-minded groups with which we have begun collaborating, such as *Cutting Class*.

In RED Year II, we would like to see our project of revolutionary coalition building deepen and expand. Taking inspiration from Fred Hampton and other radical organizers, we would like to establish innovative but workable frameworks for coordinating between different radical groups in such a way that they can maintain their autonomy but maximize their impact by working with others. Much of this work will be local to the Philadelphia area, as we explore the options for creating umbrella structures, but it will also involve greater coordination with other groups around the country and the world for more expansive modes of solidarity and support.

Direct Action

RED emerged out of direct action and the joy of working together for a common cause when you have to put something on the line. It has continued to be important as an intermittent reference point for our struggles, but we have been less successful on this front largely due to time constraints and a concern for avoiding undue penalization.

Direct action is an area where we really need to develop our strengths by tapping back into some of our earlier work and finding the time to make incisive and important interventions that nonetheless keep our members safe. In the coming year, we would like to develop our abilities to immediately be present on the scene for important issues in our area, following the lead of our friends at the **Philly Coalition for REAL Justice** and others. We would also like to be more proactive in planning ahead for important moments and organizing significant contributions on the part of RED. This can range from participating in major marches or events like May Day to making contributions to the latest flashpoints of struggle, such as anti-ICE organizing or the prison strike. Finally, we plan on launching a guerilla education series that will bring radical education to the streets and corporate universities in and around the Philadelphia area. We are looking forward to blowing some minds!

Internationalism

RED has always recognized that the struggle against global capitalism needs to be international, and many of our group members work across various geographic regions. We have drawn on these experiences in myriad ways and made some important connections to groups abroad. However, this is also an area where this is ample room for growth.

In developing our international connections, we would like to collaborate and coordinate more with other radical groups around the globe. We would also like to forge connections to some of the most important reference points for radical Left organizing in our conjuncture, such as the ZAD in France and the Zapatistas in Chiapas. This will allow us to learn more from their experiences and also help us spread their major work to even larger audiences.

En avant!

It is remarkable for us to be able to celebrate so many accomplishments by such a small organization with no financial resources, which speaks to the radical anti-capitalist spirit that animates us. There is, however, much work to be done, and RED Year II will require energy, commitment and creativity. We are excited to move forward!



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