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The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex

By Kiyoko McCrae

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RECLAIMING AUTONOMY

Review of **THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE FUNDED: BEYOND THE NON-PROFIT INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX**, edited by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence
South End Press, 2007

Following the Ford Foundation's reversal of its decision to award INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence a \$100,000 grant after reviewing their position on Palestine, the radical feminist organization sponsored the 2004 conference, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, where most of the essays in this collection were presented. This resulting anthology offers some of the best analysis of the government and the corporate elite's attempts to co-opt social movements in the US. It answers an urgent call to confront the normalization of what has come to be known as the Non-Profit Industrial Complex (NPIC)—the corporatization of progressive and radical social movements.

For those who work in the non-profit sector, the insights offered by this diverse array of activists can be enlightening, but also sobering. Perhaps the most disheartening fact is the NPIC's power to shape our approaches and tactics for social change. As Dylan Rodriguez points out, "[m]ore insidious than the...constraints exerted by the foundation/state/non-profit nexus is the way in which [it]...grounds an epistemology—literally, a way of knowing social change and resistance praxis—that is difficult to escape or rupture." This epistemology is responsible for the belief that activists must conform to 501(c)(3) status for legitimacy and funding and that social services serve a greater need and purpose than the arduous task of social change.

However, prior to the rise of the NPIC, social movements in the US took radically different approaches to social change. Madonna Thunder Hawk recalls working as a native organizer during the 1960's and 70's: "We were dealing with the policies of genocide committed by the US government, so our goal was not to assimilate in to the US...we organized first, and then figured out how to make it happen." Organizational longevity was not a concern and activism was not looked at as a career. Activists had no interest in replicating a small-business capitalist structure that has become the norm in the non-profit sector today.

In "Black Awakening in Capitalist America," Robert Allen laments the Black Power movement's transgression from autonomous revolutionaries to black capitalist professionals. Assimilation replaced revolution as CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) and other groups succumbed to the lure of lucrative foundations resolved to quell youth riots and other forms of resistance.

Arbitrary whims

Through foundations, which serve as little more than tax shelters, "white capital is circulated among white people and works to maintain systems of white supremacy." Conservative foundations contribute significantly more money to think tanks building powerful political institutions. Progressive foundations primarily support social service programs and short-term projects that focus almost entirely on providing temporary relief to the poor and uninsured, rather than the redistribution of wealth. As budgets continue to be slashed, the Left struggles to provide services previously provided by the government, leaving little room for building social movements with lasting impact. Meanwhile anti-state politicians embrace non-profits "under the rhetoric of efficiency (read: meager budgets) and accountability (read: contracts could be pulled if anybody

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meager budgets) and accountability (read: contracts could be pulled if anybody steps out of line)." As a result, the impoverished are left at the mercy of the arbitrary whims of the corporate elite who serve on the board of trustees of foundations.

While it remains to be seen how activists in the US will break rank from the NPIC, the authors offer several examples of alternatives to consider. Paula X. Rojas urges activists in the US to take cues from social movements in Latin America. She cites the two driving principles of "autonomia (autonomy)" and "horizontalidad (horizontalism)" as significant differences in Latin American movements.

Thunder Hawk recalls the higher frequency of collaborations that occurred in the 60's and 70's and Allen describes the importance of autonomy in the Black Power movement's struggle for liberation. Organizers with Sista II Sista share the challenges and freedom they have experienced by revoking their 501(c)(3) status and returning to being a volunteer collective. Stephanie Guiloud and William Cordery of Project South stress the importance of fundraising among their constituency—the very people they should be accountable to.

Collaboration is stifled when fierce competition for funding and stringent, narrow grant guidelines divide groups that are working towards the same goal. Worse yet, in many cases, non-profits are formed by individuals with the primary intention of creating jobs for themselves. These groups have no interest in true collaboration, but thrive on dominating the non-profit sector and maintaining the status quo. Post-Katrina, an alarming number of new NGOs were established by non-local, non-profit opportunists in response to the proliferation of foundation and government grants for "relief" and "rebuilding" efforts, while long-standing, displaced and struggling local organizations were squeezed out of the funding grab.

Tiffany Lethabo King and Ewuare Osayande warn that "philanthropy never intends to fund revolutionary struggle that demands the just seizure of wealth, resources, and power that has been gained by exploiting the bodies, lives and land of people of color worldwide." The NPIC's tentacles reach far beyond the US. Movements in the Global South are already under the threat of becoming non-profitized and co-opted. As activists in the US, we have an obligation to continue this discourse, learn from one another's mistakes and organize beyond the NPIC.



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