

The Revolutionary Student Front Austin (RSF) is no more. What follows is a brief summation and analysis of its strengths and weaknesses. —Red Guards Austin.

Emergence of RSF

The Revolutionary Student Front was formed in 2016 by our consciously linking up disconnected Maoist-sympathetic student supporters of the Red Guards movement via food serving programs in the popular neighborhoods. At these servings revolutionary students could interact both with the working masses as well as organized proletarian revolutionaries. It was under the guidance of cadres and advanced supporters that the students were linked up in the interest of developing a trench of combat at the universities and community colleges.

This effort was neither the creation of a party-generated organism nor an organic mass organization. It was the cultivation of a front; revolutionaries not only introduced student supporters to each other, but also began casually floating the idea of a student front, by discussing the need to organize among students and youth. It was from this long and patient work that the students took to the line and began organizing. Several names were considered, but once again the students took the direction of the cadres and settled on the name Revolutionary Student Front, which was a name originally used in Peru by the student organization aligned with the Communist Party of Peru, honoring both the tradition of those students and support for the revolutionary cause. The qualifier of “front” is quite important. *Students on their own cannot lead the class struggle*; they have mixed interests, and the promise of upward mobility—or the illusion of this promise to be more precise—creates mixed consciousness among students. Still, class struggle occurs on every campus in the US, and proletarian students must be organized as *one front*, since they are part of the proletariat. We most certainly wanted to avoid the pitfalls of other student organizations, like the Revolutionary Student Coordinating Committee, which failed due to gender discrimination and abuse. While we were greatly inspired by Progressive Youth Organization in Kansas City, we were not interested in this time in the formulation of a general youth organization. Students are not always young, and the youth are not always students. We specifically wanted to cultivate a campus front, in the interest of the working class and revolutionary movement in general, and not in the exclusive interests of students. The student struggle should have been more subordinated to the workers’ struggle, but due to a theoretical misstep (described later), this was never fully the case.

From the inception there were issues with the mentioned mixed consciousness of students. RSF was designed to be a multi-tendency mass organization initiated and led by Maoist sympathizers and supporters of the RG movement; this formula was already too eclectic. We failed to cement Maoism as the guiding light for the organization, even if all the principal leaders were students of Maoism. One founding member took the initiative to reach out for advice to an organizer in the Canadian Revolutionary Student Movement. This was done without the knowledge of our collective. While this organizer gave sound practical advice, the conditions in Canada are drastically different considering that the Austin-based organizers attended University of Texas at Austin, and US universities have a lower proletarian demographic, and are expensive and elite. Another major difference is that student organizations receive funding from Canadian universities and get full status as official campus organizations. In the US student organizations have to register and pay for recognized status, so working within the university system has limitations and restrictions if you want to become an official campus club. It was determined that RSF would be better suited as an unrecognized and illegal campus organization that would not pay the fee and would operate through faked organizations that already had status in order to acquire space and table on campus. This would soon become a problem, as the revolutionary politics were anathema to UT Austin administration, which would try and fail to prevent

RSF from distributing literature and holding official events on campus, though the administration attempted this almost consistently.

Students in the original formation had varying issues with postmodernism and a tendency to neglect actually analyzing their conditions, the latter being the root error leading to reaching out to the RSM in Ottawa, something we would have absolutely opposed. The early members, all self-identified Maoists, still had a lot of learning to do, but in spite of their limited experience their commitment to developing was truly inspiring, they would hit the ground running.

RSF and antifascism

For ages the UT at Austin campus has been a cesspool of two anti-people trends, the first being revisionism in the form of Trotskyite organizations like the ISO as well as the presence of a strong postmodern hegemony, the second being an increasing right-wing presence in the fraternities and conservative youth organizations. Until the formation of RSF there was no revolutionary left organization with the exception of the Palestine Solidarity Committee, which maintains an anti-imperialist stance and had never hesitated to support righteous struggles that go beyond their own national liberation struggle. Violent racist attacks as well as rape and sexual assault have always been an acute problem on campus and in the student neighborhood of West Campus. PSC alone was not able to fully take on the question of the growing fascist trends even though they consistently took part in antifascist struggles. The ISO on the other hand is just slightly to the left of campus democrats and is content to try to shame militant antifascists, opposing the use of masks and any form of violent action, including self-defense. Politically they are liberals and practically they are pacifists, a beyond shameful position to hold in this day and age. Unless an issue is trendy you can bet that ISO-ATX will take the fence.

In these conditions, white-supremacist graffiti had been put up on the pillars of the Blanton Museum on campus, and had then been allowed to remain up, uncovered, for 8 more months. The museum and university administration had been notified multiple times and took no action. RSF organized for a protest, and angry students were mobilized. During this mobilization, the graffiti was covered up with neutral-color paint, and a poster in the style of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China was put up where the graffiti used to be. The poster criticized the administration for having taken no action for so long. In the past, Black Lives Matter graffiti on a Confederate statue had been immediately removed, only highlighting the tendency of the administration to come down hard on progressive struggles while turning a blind eye on hate speech and racist graffiti. Immediately after this action several nonstudents nearby were arrested and charged with felony vandalism. Even though it was students who removed the graffiti and students who organized the action, campus pigs arrested people at random to stand as an example. RSF wasted no time in helping to mobilize support in the form of jail support, fundraising, and leading a solidarity protest that drew an even larger crowd than the original action. The defendants became known as the UT Antifa 3, and a successful campaign took place that resulted in dismissal of their cases over a year later.

This first action put RSF on the map and positioned them uniquely to swing against fascism. This was at a point in time when the fascists had set their sights on developing a strong local movement in Austin, and we are happy to report that in part due to the good work of RSF and their consistent actions over their lifespan, the fascists can scarcely show themselves in our city and never met their goal of developing a sustained movement here. Instead they still have to shuttle in reactionaries from out of town. RSF would launch counter-propaganda campaigns and campus patrols and lead the masses in several campus

antifascist actions while developing a core of students who would be able to participate in the broader Austin-wide red antifascist movement.

The Revolutionary Students developed a West Campus rapid response network using the eyes and ears of the masses; they would get alerts and mobilize patrols immediately. These rapid mobilizations would often chase fascists off campus or eradicate their propaganda immediately, replacing it with antifascist and revolutionary propaganda. Some of the best work on this front was carried out during this period. However, in spite of the solid on-the-ground antifascism, due to the eclecticism, lack of real leadership from the proletarian organization, and mixed class consciousness of the membership they began making some pretty serious errors. The first such error was participation in the “coalition” ATX Resists, which still exists in form and name, but only as a shell. This coalition was built totally on postmodernist lines after Trump won the election. It was a confused and ill-fated attempt at horizontalism—which never works. RSF and a few other local mass organizations failed to struggle against this flaw and ended up drawing a lot of bad ideas from its structure and meetings. For Communists, United Front work with class allies must never liquidate Communist leadership. Tailing in such a big-tent type organization that fully lacks leadership is always fruitless. While efforts were made to fight for the most revolutionary positions possible, the coalition was mainly right-opportunist. The name itself was extremely misleading, since the only active organizations were campus-based organizations and not citywide organizations. It was at these meetings that RSF would come to the terrible idea of running a mental health program and engage in both economism and a rightist deviation from the mass line.

Mental health and the slow poison of metaphysics

What bears some explanation is that while RSF and the Maoist movement worked closely together, students are not allowed membership in the Party Embryo. In spite of the rumor mill there was zero overlap between our organizations. RSF would rely on us (RGA) for advice, guidance, and training, on a strictly voluntary political basis. This was a huge problem for both organizations and one that robbed the students of Communist leadership. As students are inherently transient in Austin one benefit to this relationship is that students can be ready to join the Party Embryo upon graduating and have already accumulated a lot of experience and political education prior to joining. The serious downside to this that bears some self-criticism is that the Party Embryo will at times have great difficulty leading the mass organization, or in this case the front. This problem would assert itself in a very dangerous and painful way with RSF and be a big factor in its subsequent degeneration.

In a failed and ill-advised effort at emulating the mass line RSF embarked upon their “Revolutionary Mental Health Program” while we criticized this trajectory from the very start and at most conceded to the democratic decision of the front, viewing it as an experiment and a learning experience. When it became clear to the Party Embryo that the mental health program had recruited nonstudent leadership over the program, who were using new age therapy in the form of circling, cadres started offering sharpened criticism and attempted to dissuade RSF from continuing in this direction. Our intervention was not firm enough, and RSF merely conceded to getting the existing nonstudent leaders of this program by having them mentor students who could replace them. Due to this imbalance of power between mentor and student and mainly due to the bourgeois and rightist approach to mental health, this would have disastrous results. Even our most firm insistence that this be stopped was not received. We unite with the document summarizing the mental health program and will not elaborate on its content. We only wish to make it clear that our organization opposed this program and struggled with RSF leadership until the program was finally abandoned and the document of self-critical summary was released. Our position has not changed.

Group discussions about feelings will at best only complement struggles against mental illness. In our analysis the program lacked a struggle component and visibly lowered the students' ability to fight.

Orienting toward the mentally ill is already an issue in and of itself, one that was also criticized. While mental illness must be addressed by revolutionary organizations, it should not be the main activity of a student front. Our membership consistently warned against this for months and directly warned RSF about including one of their facilitators who would later be expelled for abusive behavior. Our advice took time to reach the ears of the front, and they were too slow at making changes and truly learned the hard way. The militant student leaders were finally able to win the correct position via democratic struggle internal to RSF. There was a persisting issue here of too many leaders who were too poorly equipped to lead, which led to errors of ultra-democracy and bureaucratic hesitation.

The lingering effect of the mental health program is finally just now beginning to assert itself. While in-depth analysis is premature, we can confidently state that the mental health problems of the membership of the front remained a constant impediment to organizing, *exacerbated by their incorrect approach to the question*. Membership would come and go, neglect work, and fall off. This is made worse by the fact that when veteran organizers graduate and move, a crisis of leadership asserts itself on the general body. Worse than any of the above-mentioned conditions are the deep-rooted postmodernist ideas so prevalent on US campuses. This almost hegemonic force would assert itself in struggles over mental health, bourgeois arguments for self-care and "taking a break" would come into play, and activists would default to using mental health as an excuse to avoiding their organizational commitments, which would negatively impact the organization as a whole. Without being insensitive to those dealing with mental illness, we must insist, from our vantage point as a proletarian organization, that students in Austin, even working-class students, have it far better than the average worker—not just in terms of financial consideration but also in terms of resources and overall social status. Many students at UT come from upper-petty-bourgeois or even bourgeois class backgrounds. This bears mention because it influences their class stand and their class consciousness: selfishness and individualism are not anomalies—and many students are lazy, spoiled, or both. There were many petty-bourgeois students in the front who strongly manifested these errors, and they would push postmodernist lines in the org. Even worse, actual revolutionary students and even a few militant ones would capitulate to this mindset, and after getting frustrated with constant struggles with postmodernists would themselves begin to manifest the postmodernists' errors, citing mental illness as an excuse to all but cease organizing. These conditions, combined with our hesitation to put cadres in the organization who could rectify and correct it, created the perfect storm.

To the detriment of left-wing movements in the US, students are the main demographic that revisionists and liberals have drawn on to populate their organizations. The ISO is nothing but a campus organization that poaches from popular movements; they rely on a revolving door of dues-paying students who frequently come and go. This is not unique, as petty-bourgeois college kids make up the majority of the legal left, and a few of them stick around to become career NGO activists. The student-dominated left by its very nature cannot meaningfully have an impact on the proletariat as a class. It is no surprise that many students, while capable of great bravery and daring direct actions, are neither stable nor reliable in the long view of organizing the hardcore of the proletariat and reaching the deepest and most profound sections of the masses. For this reason and so many more, students absolutely require organized proletarian leadership. Student-based organizing can only ever be an auxiliary, as it can never in itself be a way to apply Lenin's teaching to go lower and deeper among the masses. For this reason we oppose becoming a student-dominated movement. Once college is over and career opportunities come in, all that bourgeois training is activated, and they often take their places outside of, and in many cases opposed to,

our class. The best student organizers, who should be upheld as good examples, are most often the ones who, due to economic crisis, are unable to put their education to use in entering a well-paying career. These students, *who every year become more numerous*, are justifiably angry and sick of capitalism and can make great Communists. This is our attitude toward student organizing and will continue to be the basis of our orientation when it comes to the campus trench or more broadly a student front.

Proletarian feminism in action

Some of the very best work carried out by RSF was in the context of the women's struggle. Internally, abusers would be dealt with correctly and without gloves. This must be understood as a raising of the bar for student organizing. Student organizing is rife with date rape and macktivism (using activism to flirt, almost always with women), and sexual harassment and unwanted advances are too common. RSF was a shining example of something better, something new, and something truly proletarian feminist. While many organizations either preferred to avoid controversy or had misogynist men in top positions, RSF would earn consistent support from students due to their revolutionary stance on the women's struggle. The struggles against sexist abuse did not stop at the end of membership lists. The front would embark on campaigns to make abusers afraid to exist on UT campus in the face of an administration that harbors them. The most notable of these campaigns was the highly successful campaign against the now-deceased Richard Morrisett. Morrisett was widely reported in the media for having seriously abused his ex. Successful protests and creative, well-place graffiti forced the campus to reevaluate its policy of keeping on professors like Morrisett.

On International Working Women's Day of 2018, the Littlefield Fountain on UT campus, a monument to the US imperialist involvement in WWI, was dyed red and adorned with pro-women Communist slogans. This action, inspired by RSF agitation, really shook things up. It was reported around the world and interest in struggling against abusers mounted. Morrisett himself would soon die. While his cause of death is unpublished, it is not going out on a limb to state that this happened amid a militant campaign against him in which Communists led the way in bringing the full weight of his transgressions down upon him. His death is lighter than a feather and we shed no tears at his passing. Had he had the decency to attempt to rectify and be transformed, perhaps whatever ended him could have been avoided. Nonetheless, the campaign to get him off campus permanently, whether by the action of nature or by the activity of revolutionaries, was successful. While only time will tell what caused his death, the actual cause matters less than the campaign and the events in the lead-up to it, which in spite of anything else should be repeated and improved.

Decline and dissolution

Despite the momentum from the anti-Morrisett campaign, the organization's leaders failed to implement proper recruitment and training. This happened at a time when key leaders were to graduate or cease to be students. The training of leaders should always be a constant concern of any organization, and we stressed this to RSF. With summer approaching and students returning home, this training was not carried out, and the militants in the front reached a fatal impasse.

This combination of factors spelled the end of RSF. The imbalance of commitment between the casual attitude of the student rank and file and the devotion of the longtime student organizers who were soon to stop being students meant that only a very few members were suitable to step up and get elected as leaders. Unfortunately, and due to reasons still unclear to us, many of these potential leaders dropped off, citing various personal reasons, including the excuse of "taking a mental health break" (an excuse we implacably reject). Others who were committed to postmodernist ideas had already found themselves in

contradiction with anything revolutionary and had been trickling out for months; these people in search of a social club to do little more than bemoan their existence sought elsewhere and rejected proletarian politics and the proletarian worldview. RSF leaders had placed all of their eggs in one basket—the idea that they would train their replacements in a summer school that was to take place throughout the summer of 2018 (when this article is being written). Without the leaders of RSF ever clearly stating a reason why not—even when asked about it directly—summer school never took place.

The remaining membership of the front took up the work of organizing student tenants who are being threatened with displacement and gentrification; they remain committed to this work. To complicate matters, student leaders who support the Party-building project failed to make honest or accurate assessments of their decline. When questioned they responded dismissively that “yes people have fallen off, but the organization is better off without their influence and will not be impeded.” This rose-colored report is reminiscent of those from the communes that would fake their statistics during the Great Leap forward in China. It amounts in this case to an unwillingness to confront their incorrect working methods and accept proletarian leadership. They did not want to struggle with their critics or their mistakes—and took the path of avoidance. As a result, reports were informal, distorted, and infrequent or absent. Those who could have helped were not really able to provide the advice the students really needed. We understand this as prideful arrogance, a petty-bourgeois trait common in students.

While there are still activists trained and developed by the high points in RSF’s struggles, the organization itself reached an all-time low, in terms of both membership and quality of work. At this point a veteran leader, who was the main force behind the goal of training the organization to sustain itself (as well as one of the people making fluffed-up reports), simply walked away from the work without comment or informing anyone and has since left the city, becoming a deserter. This was the last gasp of the organization.

Fight again

An organization such as a Party Embryo is to operate like the nerve center of the local revolutionary movement. We have a commitment to the younger generation of organizers, and failed in our commitment to RSF, which at one point was one of—if not the—largest red student fronts in the country. Our method of organizing the students had fundamental flaws in its framework; we took too long to realize the inherent errors of only offering political leadership, guidance, support, and advice. Organizational and structured leadership in an official sense would have been better.

It is in the struggles of the working class that Communists will be forged and tempered. We do not relent or give up; we just recognize our faults and the deformed and degenerated condition of one singular trench in a city where we wage class struggle on many fronts. It is our duty and intention to glean every bit of knowledge we can from this experience, both good and bad, and to provide that in synthesis to other organizers and would-be organizers. It is our duty and intention to develop Communists in the high schools, community colleges, and universities of Austin and the US. In this struggle leadership is decisive, and learning to implement democratic centralism in the mass organizations is critical. The fact that none of our cadres are students means that we had to learn by doing and admit errors to implement rectification. We know that Mao is correct in his often repeated quotation that a single spark can start a prairie fire; unfortunately, some fires go out.

RSF had in its short time turned the University of Texas at Austin into a shining trench of combat. Many brave students held their post at that front; we honor them and their commitment and look forward to their

future in off-campus organizing, where they are sure to become even better revolutionaries. The closing of a front is less than a bend in the road; with faith in the masses and better Communist leadership, nothing is impossible, and we will prevail. Campus organizing is important, but it is less important than organizing the nonstudent oppressed masses. We are a relatively small organization and will continue developing new and improved trenches of combat. RSF will rise again like a phoenix from its ashes, next time stronger and better. The old is dead, long live the new. As surely as the bourgeoisie produce their own gravediggers, the class struggle on campus will produce new Communists, and we will make it so. We take heart in the history of Peru's University of Ayacucho de Huamanga, once a fierce trench led by the Communist Party of Peru. When conditions were right, they developed Communists and sent them among the people, and away from the university. This is now also the history of RSF, whose members now will swim like fish among the proletarian masses of Austin. We understand that holding a trench for the sake of vanity is a fool's errand. To the former Revolutionary Student Front: Thank you for your contribution to the class struggles in Austin. Thank you for your services in the struggles against fascism. Thank you for your sacrifices and your spilled blood that has mingled with our own. Many of you have remained Communists after you stopped being students, and we welcome you as comrades! Some others have fallen away, and we remind them: luxury is fleeting while struggle is permanent; you know your post and must return to it. History demands it. No matter what you will participate in class struggle and it is crucial to be sided with the proletariat and not the class enemies.

The closing of one front among many is not a cause for mourning but a call to increase our organizing efforts, taking firmly to the task of going to the deepest and most profound masses and educating them in revolutionary violence. Our summation and self-criticism is but one more step in this march forward.

—Red Guards Austin, Summer 2018