

# LEFTROOTS' MOVEMENT ASSESSMENT TOOL

## San Francisco Bay Area

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### **SOCIAL MOVEMENT LEFTISTS**

1. *About how many social movement leftists are in your local area?*
  - a. More than 300
  - b. The Bay Area has a lot of social movement Leftists. There is a longstanding community of social movement Leftists who are engaged in community organizing, labor organizing, and other activist work. Many social movement Leftists from other regions in the country come to the Bay Area to receive training or out of a desire to be in a strong community of Leftists. Some stay permanently and some stay for a while and bring back what they have learned to their home towns.
2. *To what extent are social movement leftists in your area connected to one another?*
  - a. It definitely feels like we have a community
  - b. While the communities of social movement Leftists tend to be broken down by political tendency and/or ideology, people engage with each other both through political work and through social settings like sports, childcare, music, and family / community events.
3. *Are there any particular tensions (current or historic) that are playing out now between social movement leftists?*
  - a. Yes
  - b. There are some areas where tensions among social movement leftists exist. Some examples include: tensions between different tendencies of movement veterans from the 70s and 80s; some lingering tensions between anarchists, communists, and revolutionary nationalists; and some tensions between folks focused on organizing oppressed communities and folks focused on building prefigurative alternative institutions.
4. *LeftRoots believes that our movements have a lot to learn and benefit from various political traditions and tendencies. Amongst social movement leftists in your local area, what political tendencies have the greatest influence—either in terms of organizations or in terms of ideas influencing popular thought? Please check all that apply.*
  - a. Anarchism
  - b. Some form of Identity Politics
  - c. Other: While the Bay Area has social movement leftists who fit into each of these categories, I'd say that broadly the current movement culture has been greatly influenced by Anarchism and Identity Politics. Even when people don't directly identify with those political tendencies, they have a relatively hegemonic influence over the politics and practice of social movement leftists, for better or worse. There are strong pockets of people who identify with Revolutionary Marxism and Revolutionary Nationalism, but those politics and the associated

practices are much less hegemonic in defining the broader movement culture.

5. *Please list 2 - 5 questions are social movement leftists in your area currently grappling with?*

- a. *Question 1:* How can we most effectively contribute to rebuilding the Left?
- b. *Question 2:* What is the role of revolutionary Left cadre organizations?
- c. *Question 3:* What is the most strategic relationship between mass work and Left work?
- d. *Question 4:* What were the key failures of 20th century socialist projects and what would a renewed 21st century socialism look like?
- e. *Question 5:* How can we best balance the need for democratic and protagonist led social movements with the need for political leadership and strategy?

## 1. MOVEMENT HISTORY

1. Historically, which political tendency/tendencies have influenced movement thinking and attitudes in your local area? *Please check all that apply.*
  - a. Anarchism
  - b. Revolutionary Marxism
  - c. Revolutionary Nationalism
  - d. Some form of Identity Politics
  - e. Liberalism, Reformism
  - f. Notes: While today anarchism and identity politics and relatively hegemonic, historically the Bay Area has had strong movements rooted in Anarchism, Revolutionary Nationalism, Revolutionary Marxism, and identity politics, which have all strongly shaped movement history at different points. From the Black Panthers to the New Communist Movement, to the rise of Anarchism, the emergence of folks influenced by organizations like Incite -- they have all had their moments and left their impact.
2. To what extent does revolutionary movement history impact the character of the movement in your area today?
  - a. Scale (1 – 10): 10- It is present in lots of different parts of local culture and memory
  - b. Notes: People have been very inspired by the movement history in our area and its a point of pride for social movement leftists here.
3. Are there older movement activists and organizers in your area who are still active and willing to provide mentoring to younger activists?
  - a. Yes, there are and they function at high levels.
  - b. Notes: There are a number of movement veterans who are still very active in movement work, and many social movement leftists have been or continue to be mentored by them.

## **2. MOVEMENT & ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT**

1. *What are the three biggest strengths of movement forces in your local area?*
  - a. Deep engagement in mass work. Particular tendencies within the social movement left in the Bay Area have spent a long time strongly rooting themselves in mass organizing through community organizing, labor organizing, and to a certain extent electoral organizing. The result of this is that in the Bay Area there is one of the strongest concentrations of well trained mass organizers with revolutionary left politics in the US.
  - b. There have been significant efforts are finding common ground and breaking down sectarianism amongst social movement leftists. The result is that there is a higher level of shared work and relationships between social anarchists, communists, and revolutionary nationalists than in most of the US.
  - c. There is a rich history and experience in building influential Left organizations, and movement veterans from those projects are still around and happy to mentor and provide lessons from their successes and failures. There is also an openness to try new approaches without throwing out the bathwater of the socialist tradition.
2. *What are the three biggest challenges to movement forces in your local area being more effective?*
  - a. Lack of coherent strategy for building socialism in the US.
  - b. A rejection of socialist politics based on the failures of 21st century socialist projects.
  - c. Individualism and an obsession with prefigurative politics and building alternative institutions.
3. *What's the density of movement institutions based in your local area? (by 'movement institutions' we mean community organizations, trade unions, worker centers, training centers, research institutes, youth groups, organizational support centers, service organizations, worker coops, activist churches, etc.)*
  - a. Scale (1 - 10): 8
  - b. *Notes:* The Bay Area has a lot of movement institutions, from community organizations, labor unions, workers centers, training centers, research groups, etc. Some of which have been around for a long time, and some of which are new. The Bay Area acts as something like an incubator for these types of institutions nationally. Social movement leftists from around the country come to the Bay Area to gain training and experience, and many people look to the Bay Area for models of work to try and build up in other areas of the US.
4. *What is a rough percentages of time and energy that movement organizations devote to different approaches to social change that groups in your area?*
  - a. Service Provision: 5%
  - b. Organizing: 25%
  - c. Advocacy: 20%
  - d. Electoral: 20%
  - e. Cultural Work: 5%
  - f. Alternative Institution Building (Coops, Time banks, etc.): 20%

- g. Political and/or popular education: 5%
  - h. Other
5. *What alliances or networks are organizations connected to? Please check all that apply.*
- a. Jobs with Justice
  - b. Grassroots Global Justice,
  - c. National Domestic Workers Alliance
  - d. NDLON
  - e. AFL-CIO
  - f. Change to Win
  - g. Climate Justice Alliance
  - h. PICO
  - i. United Workers Congress
  - j. U.S. Students Association
  - k. Other: Right to the City Alliance
6. *What communities, sectors are most organized, most connected to organizations in your local area?*
- a. The Black working class
  - b. The Latin@ working class
  - c. The Asian working class
  - d. *Notes:* In those communities there are ongoing basebuilding efforts at both the community and labor levels.
7. *What communities, sectors are least organized, most connected to organizations in your local area?*
- a. Working class communities that have been pushed out to the periphery (outlying suburbs) by gentrification
  - b. The white working class in general
  - c. *Notes:*
8. *To what extent are movement organizations able to impact on the local policy-making process and elected officials?*
- a. Scale (1 - 10): 7
  - b. *Notes:* Certain sectors regularly engage with local government and have some impact on policy, and there have been a number of attempts at getting people elected to local office - some successful and some not.
9. *If there are revolutionary organizations in your local area, how do they relate to the community organizing and movement work that you are involved in?*
- a. Scale (1 - 10): 6
    - i. One: We are not aware of revolutionary organizations in our area.
    - ii. Two: They only seem to appear at events that we organize.
    - iii. Five: They're here, and they do work, but we do not work together.
    - iv. Ten: We work closely together with some revolutionary organization(s)
  - b. *Notes:* There are active revolutionary organizations in the bay area. Many don't have positive relationships with social movement organizations and don't play well with others (sectarian, act as leeches on legitimate organizing work, paper pushers, etc), while a few (like MXGM and FRSO) have positive and close working relationships with authentic social movement organizations.

*10. How strong are movement education/training efforts for organizers and activists in your local area?*

- a. Scale (1 - 10): 7
  - i. One: There's very little, and we need some
  - ii. Five: There are some, but we need more
  - iii. Ten: Strong enough; That's not a need for our local area
- b. Notes: There are a number of training programs available (like SOUL and the Anne Braden Program), but there could definitely be more and ones with a stronger focus on developing people's mass organizing skill -- a role that CTWO used to play but is in decline.

*11. LeftRoots believes that our movements have a lot to learn and benefit from various political traditions and tendencies. In the movement in your local area, what political tendencies have the greatest influence today— either in terms of organizations or in terms of ideas influencing popular thought? Please check all that apply.*

- a. Anarchism
- b. Revolutionary Marxism
- c. Revolutionary Nationalism
- d. Some form of Identity Politics
- e. Other: They all have an influence, but Anarchism and Identity Politics have the most hegemonic influence at this time.

### **3. POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE LOCAL AREA**

1. *How would you describe your area?*
  - a. City
  - b. Other: We are an urban area that serves as a finance hub for the region. There are also outlying suburbs that many working class communities of color are being pushed to because of gentrification.
2. *What is the population of the local area? (Multiple Choice)*
  - a. Larger than 1,5000,000
3. *What are the racial demographics of the local area? (Approximate percentages)*
  - a. Indigenous/Native: 0.70%
  - b. Black/African descendent: 7%
  - c. Latin@/Chican@: 23%
  - d. Asian: 23%
  - e. Pacific Islander: 0.60%
  - f. Caribbean: 0.60%
  - g. White: 50%
  - h. Notes: Increasing displacement of African Americans
4. *What is the rough percentage of immigrants in the area?*
  - a. Immigrants: Roughly 30%
  - b. Undocumented immigrants: Studies have reported around 500,000 undocumented people in the Bay. Hard to tell if that's accurate or if the number is considerably higher.
  - c. Notes (Please note anything relevant about understanding the immigrant communities in your area, i.e., large Palestinian community, growing Mexican and Central American communities, etc.)
5. *What is the rough percentage of working class people in your area?*
  - a. Percentage: Roughly 60%
  - b. Notes: Hard to find any real accurate numbers, especially without a solid definition of "working class"
6. *What are three of the most dominant economic sectors in your area?*
  - a. Hi-Tech
  - b. Finance
  - c. Real Estate
  - d. Other (space for notes)
7. *What's the spectrum of local politics represented by elected officials in your local area?*
  - a. Conservative Democrat (Blue Dogs)
  - b. Centrist Democrat (Third Way, DLC Democrats)
  - c. Old "New Deal" Democrat (Pro-Regulation, Pro-Capitalism)
  - d. Progressive but Pro-Capitalist Democrats
  - e. Other (space for notes)
8. *What are 1 - 2 important cultural dynamics shaping the conditions in your local area?*
  - a. Extreme gentrification generated by the tech, financial, and real estate sectors are pushing working class communities (especially Black communities) out of the urban centers and into the outlying working class suburbs with little access to jobs and services.

- b. The cultural remake of the urban areas that used to be predominantly working class communities of color by the influx of wealthy young white people particularly in the tech sector.

*9. What are three of the most pressing issues facing people in your area?*

- a. Lack of quality jobs
- b. Lack of quality, affordable housing
- c. Lack of quality public services

*10. Why are these the 3 most pressing area?*

- a. When working class Black families migrated to the Bay Area on masse around World War II there was an abundance of decent union jobs in the factories and canneries. These jobs enabled families to buy houses and maintain decent lives. Due to deindustrialization those jobs are gone and most working class folks are pushed into low wage service jobs.
- b. With the increase in gentrification housing costs are skyrocketing which is pushing working class communities of color out of the urban centers, thus reducing their political power in the region.
- c. The social safety net has been largely gutted at a time when it is most needed in working class communities of color due to high levels of homelessness and unemployment.

#### **4. LEFTROOTS BRANCH**

1. *How did you first hear about LeftRoots?*
  - a. We are both LeftRoots members who have worked closely with the founding crew for many years.
2. *What gave you the best understanding of what LeftRoots is trying to do?*
  - a. 1-on-1 conversation with someone in LeftRoots
  - b. *Other:* All of the above
3. *Have any of you participated in any of LeftRoots HangOuts?*
  - a. Yes
  - b. *Notes:* Between the two of us, we've participated in all of them.
4. *Which of the LeftRoots HangOuts that you joined were your favorites? Please check all that apply.*
  - a. Ear to the Ground with NTanya Lee & Steve Williams (2013.04.12)
  - b. Popular Protagonism & Political Instruments with Marta Harnecker (2013.05.15)
  - c. JusticeForTrayvon (2013.07.17)
  - d. Twenty-first Century Socialism with Michael Lebowitz (2013.09.05)
  - e. Transformation of Self & Society with Raquel Lavin□a, Staci Haines & Spenta Kandawalla (2013.11.08)
  - f. Venezuela & the Bolivarian Revolution with George Ciccariello-Maher (2014.04.03)
  - g. Jackson Rising with Ask-Lee Henderson & Sacajawea Hall (2014.04.29)
  - h. Grassroots Feminism with Sandra Mora□n (2014.06.20)
  - i. Leadership Development & the National Union of the Homeless with Willie Baptist (2014.08.15)
  - j. *Notes*
5. *What did you appreciate about that HangOuts?*
  - a. *Notes:* The level of both political clarity and openness to trying new approaches to the work.
6. *Based on what you know of LeftRoots' Points of Unity, our plan to develop strategy for socialist liberation and the work involved in building a branch of LeftRoots, how many social movement leftists do you think might be interested in building a branch in your local area?*
  - a. 50 or more
  - b. *Notes:* We already have 50 dues paying cadre and have another incoming class later this year.
7. *LeftRoots has a commitment to develop a membership which involves a super-majority of people from historically oppressed and exploited communities. In the Bay Area branch, this looks like a membership that is overwhelmingly made up of people of color, women and transgender folks. Amongst the social movement leftists in your local area, do you think that it would be possible to develop a LeftRoots branch that involves a super-majority of people from oppressed and exploited communities?*
  - a. Yes

8. *Amongst those folks, are there active tensions that might get in the way of folks working together?*
- Yes
  - Notes: There are some tensions I'm sure, but we've largely managed them well.
9. *What do you think would excite social movement leftists in your area about starting a branch of LeftRoots? Please check all that apply.*
- Opportunity to build relationships with other social movement leftists and be part of a larger team
  - Chance to study with other social movement leftists
  - Project of articulating a strategy for liberation
  - Opportunity to improve their practice as organizers, movement builders
  - Having an organizational vehicle to weigh in with other social movement leftists at key moments
  - Chance to spark the next Left in the U.S. from the grassroots
10. *What might be some concerns social movement leftists in your area might have about starting a branch of LeftRoots? Please check all that apply.*
- Time and capacity necessary to build LeftRoots on top of existing work
  - Never been in Left spaces before/Never had positive experience in Left spaces
  - National organization might squash some of the autonomy of local work
  - Notes