QUEERNESS AND LEFTISM

BY QUEER YOUTH, FOR QUEER YOUTH
Queer organizing and leftist politics have a long and complex history, often distilled or riddled with misinformation online.

Queer Youth Assemble made this guide for queer youth to understand a bit of the history of queer people and leftist politics and leftist organizing tactics used in queer organizing spaces.

View the Further Reading section at the end for various manifestos, zines, archives, and books to explore for more information on the topic!
QUEERNESS AND LEFTISM

"Despite Everything, Queer Leftists Survived" by Scott W. Stern

The mutual exclusion of leftists and queer people from society led to interaction between these groups—censorship laws targeted both queer and radical political content.

Queer people engaging in sex work or labor industries became involved in radical leftist struggles. Sex work specifically connected working class people with sexual transgression, along with the many queer and trans people doing survival sex work due to their exclusion from society.
Queerness and leftism were further associated during the moral panic dubbed the ‘Lavender Scare’ during the Cold War. Queer people were fired from government employment, described as being “perhaps as dangerous as the actual Communists.”

This historical context developed into a gay rights movement intent on proving the respectability of queer people and challenging the perception of queerness as dangerous to the status quo, thus excluding those who did not align with these demands of assimilation.

In response to this demand to be palatable to society, radical queer organizations formed with the intent of meeting the specific needs of non-palatable queer people, including those who were BIPOC, trans, poor, or sex workers. These organizations included the Gay Liberation Front and Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries.
LEFTIST ORGANIZING

Founded in 1992 in New York City, the Lesbian Avengers used nontraditional activism and direct action, with a focus on lesbian issues and visibility.

The outline devised a series of questions organizers can ask themselves about their initiative:

- Why are we doing this action and what are we trying to achieve?
- Who do we want to include?
- Why this time, date, and location?
- What is the action scenario from beginning to end?
- Who are the coordinators?
- What are the logistics of the location?
- Who are our legal observers and what are our legal rights?
- What decisions and preparations have we made about arrests?
LEFTIST ORGANIZING

- Where and how are our flyers being distributed, wheat-pasted, and mailed?
- What other groups have we contacted?
- When is the Marshall training/pre-action meeting? Who will coordinate and chair it?
- When are the poster/prop parties?
- If needed, who is coordinating the civil disobedience training?
- Who will interact with the police on site?
- How are we letting people know about the action and encouraging them to attend?
Many leftist groups utilize consensus decision making, using a foundation of common values and a commitment to all members. Consensus takes the place of voting, and allows all members to participate in the decision making process equitably. The following comes from the process used by ACT UP, available in their historical archives.

The right of consensus it to be able to express oneself in one’s own words and of one’s own will. The corresponding responsibility is to assure others the right to speak and be heard.
The process entails all parties discussing an issue; a resolution will be put forward and amended through more discussion or withdrawn. Once a resolution is understood by all and there are no further amendments, consensus is reached. Individuals in the group reserve the right to block consensus if they cannot morally allow the group to take a certain action or stance.

Essential roles in the process include a facilitator that aids group moving discussion forward, a “vibes-watcher” that ensures equity in participation dynamics, and a recorder/time-keeper.
FURTHER READING

Manifestos:
- Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle
- Lesbian Avengers Dyke Manifesto
- Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries Manifesto
- Gay Liberation Front Manifesto

Archives:
- Queer Zine Archive Project
- Black Trans Archive
- The ACT UP Historical Archive

Books:
- Transgender History by Susan Stryker
- When Brooklyn Was Queer by Hugh Ryan
- Come Together edited by Aubrey Walter
- The Stonewall Reader edited by NY Public Library
- Transgender Warriors by Leslie Feinberg
- We are Everywhere by Matthew Riemer and Leighton Brown
- Not Straight, Not White by Kevin Mumford
- Burn It Down by Breanne Fahs
- The Transgender Issue by Shon Faye
ABOUT QYA

Queer Youth Assemble is a queer youth-led nonprofit serving queer and trans youth under 25 in the United States.

To find more resources like this one, learn more about our work, or get involved yourself, go to our website queeryouthassemble.org or visit our Instagram @queeryouthassemble.