

Another reason to join a political organisation is for the opportunity to grow both personally and politically, by which I mean developing leadership and organising skills, as well as developing ideas and theory. For me, joining MAS has pushed me out of my comfort zone many times and forced me to grow in ways that working in a non-profit never could. First of all, it is extremely hard to function as part of a group. There is a steep learning curve for learning how to deal with different personalities, how to express ideas and be respectful of other people's ideas even when you don't agree with them, and also learning to be accountable to others. One can say that this is no different from joining an affinity group or a workplace committee or other campaign, but I think that joining a political organisation involves much more commitment. Affinity groups and neighbourhood committees usually end after a campaign or action, but joining a political group means that you are committing to it for the long haul, obviously growing and changing over time, but working towards one goal.

Another positive aspect of joining MAS has been getting the chance to engage more on a theoretical and ideological level. Before I joined I had not read much theory and felt intimidated; knowing that this a common concern for many women, but in MAS we have bi-monthly reading groups where we read different essays or books, regardless of whether a group member has read it before. Members are also encouraged to bring up topics that they want to learn more about or feel are interesting. It was harder for me at first to engage in the discussion, but with time, it has become easier and I am glad that I have participated. It is only by challenging our comfort zones that we can grow. What is most important to highlight is that no one is an "expert" in all things revolutionary, and no matter the level of theoretical development or organising experience everyone has something to contribute to the group.

While there is also a certain amount of individual responsibility on women to join groups, it is also important for groups to create the environment that will make women feel welcome and respected. This means prioritising the recruitment of women, whether it's by identifying women that are interested or who would be good members, collaborating in

events with women/feminist organisations, as well as having a public presence to be able to engage with more women. It also means strategic organising in mass movements with women, in order to help develop women leaders as well as possible recruits.

If there are new women members in the group, just like any new member, it is important to have someone check in with them and make sure they are not falling through the cracks; as well as make sure that the other women in the group are providing support for new members.

What I am writing is not something new, but I feel that the participation of women in revolutionary organisations is still minimal. As such, I feel a responsibility to urge women who are feeling stuck, alone, and are serious about being part of a larger movement of abolishing all forms of oppression to consider joining a political group. Our voices are often excluded and not heard, and only by inserting ourselves into the discussion will things change. As cliché as it may sound, we must include the fight against patriarchy in our struggle to end capitalism and state control and we can't do it alone. Women have a lot to contribute, and by being part of a group or even creating a space within a group, we can help push this forward.

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Why Women Should Join Political Organisations



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What I am writing is not something new, but I feel that the participation of women in revolutionary organisations is still minimal. As such, I feel a responsibility to urge women who are feeling stuck, alone, and are serious about being part of a larger movement of abolishing all forms of oppression to consider joining a political group. Our voices are often excluded and not heard, and only by inserting ourselves into the discussion will things change.

In Miami Autonomy and Solidarity, we have discussions with people that might identify with the “left” in general to see where our political agreement lies; as well as to learn from each other with the goal of reaching enough unity to become members of MAS.

While these discussions have helped us engage with a lot of different people, and have led to new membership there is a noticeable hole in our group - a severe lack of women members. MAS has prioritised recruiting more women and we have had many continuous discussions with women from different backgrounds, yet none have joined.

For example, one of our members had been meeting regularly with a young woman involved in various social movements here in Miami but had reached a certain point where the discussion stopped. Recently I was speaking with this young woman and she expressed to me that the person she had been meeting with didn't understand her because she was a woman and he could not see her perspective. Unfortunately, someone that could have over time become a potential member was lost.

Is it because this man could not “understand” her that she did not join? Would it have been different if the discussions had been with me? Though it may have helped a little, I think that the problem is much larger than just identity. It is an issue that I have

seen in too many political/revolutionary organisations, and that continues to be a problem as well as a source of frustration for many of these groups; particularly the women who are members of them, but also for those outside of them that may have some ties to these groups.

“Why are there not more women in revolutionary groups?” This is a question that I often ask myself, and one that pushes itself into my consciousness during times like the Class Struggle Anarchist Conference where a woman utilizing the conference space randomly asked me if there was a men's conference happening that weekend. In the following sections, I will discuss briefly why I think that there is a lack of women in revolutionary groups; as well as why women should join these groups, and why there's a need for groups to make a serious effort to recruit women.

Until I joined MAS, I had never joined a political organisation. Like many women, much of the images and histories of many groups on the Left, or that identified as revolutionary, disillusioned me. I had read and seen the silencing and exclusion of women, a class reductionist mentality, groups that did not engage in social movements but instead focused on tactics like the black bloc and big manifestations, and of course - machismo. These are typical discussions and critiques that have been said many times, and there have been more developed analysis and critiques that I feel do not need to be elaborated here. Besides some of the stereotypes I had of revolutionary groups, I also felt that I did not belong or fit in. I felt like there was nothing for me to get out of it, and for the practical reason that no one ever talked to me about joining either.

Yet, while there are groups that are still hanging on to some of these subculture and insular activities, there has been a shift within some of these groups to focus on organising and participate in social movements; as well as a recognition of previous behaviour towards women, and in many cases a change in how women are treated and respected in a group. So as a woman, I decided to make a choice: I could either continue to work for a non-profit, or be involved with one in some capacity, as an individual, and never see any fundamental change happen, or I could try and put some of my pre-conceived notions about revolu-

tionary groups aside and join a group; making it something that I would want to be part of, that other women would want to be part of, and that hopefully will one day lead to revolution.

I know so many women that have so much to contribute - their ideas, organising experience, parenting experience, etc. - and have talked with them about many of their frustrations with non-profits or with individual activism, and yet they continue to work alone. If we continue like this and don't come together around a common ideological framework then there will never be an end to patriarchy or oppression.

Women throughout the world are living in some of the most severe circumstances - from being the lowest paid workers, often having two jobs, and facing institutional and personal violence, and yet though there are many feminist and women's organisations that are doing good work to improve the conditions of women, without a fundamental change in society, one where working class women are not exploited by both capitalism and by the state, these will merely be reforms that will only improve the lives of some women and will not guarantee an end to the exploitation of all women.

As bell hooks writes in *Talking Back, Talking Black*, “Feminism, as a liberation struggle, must exist apart from and as part of the larger struggle to eradicate domination in all its forms. We must understand that patriarchal domination shares an ideological foundation with racism and other forms of group oppression, that there is no hope it can be eradicated while these systems remain intact.” If we don't work towards ending wage exploitation, we will find that the world will look the same as it does now, with rich women exploiting us and making decisions over our own lives.

Hooks also writes about “learning how to be in solidarity, how to struggle with one another” as part of building a feminist movement. A revolutionary organisation is a place where anti-capitalist women can come together and debate ideas, organise together and advance the struggle for a just society. It's also a place where women can struggle with male comrades around their own sexist beliefs, while also working with them as equals and learning from each other.