

BIG FLAME

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ORGANISING ACTION

Notes On Organising & Agitation

Organising People For Power

Amended and abridged from "Organising People For Power" by Felipe Maglaya, based on experiences and tactics in The Philippines.

The transfer of power from the oppressor to the oppressed is not easily accomplished. Part of the difficulty lies in the "Culture of Silence" inculcated into people's consciousness by centuries of domination. By slow degrees the oppressed have internalised a subservient mentality reinforced by their daily experience. They find it difficult to see their liberation in terms of their own strength and look instead outside themselves; the oppressed cannot imagine that the power they await lies within them and lapse into a state of passivity awaiting liberation from heaven, the hills, somewhere else. To shatter the "Culture of Silence", we must organise people everywhere on the basis of their real and felt problems; even if the issues focus on immediate needs, the experience of organising themselves and confronting their oppressors becomes a crucial one for the oppressed. In organising people for power, we aim at establishing powerful participatory organisations through which the oppressed can enter the sphere of decision-making. The aim of organising people is two-fold: to achieve a liberation of consciousness and to create actual instruments of power.

Conflict-Confrontation

One method of organising and agitating is the "conflict-confrontation" method which aims to bring hidden oppression to the surface and make people realise the cause of and solution to this oppression. Conflict-Confrontation involves mass participation and preparation. Preparation means determining the proper demands, devising the tactic that will be most effective, anticipating events through role-playing, organising, logistics etc. The organiser does not create conflict; it is there to begin with, often in latent form. Conflict-Confrontation is a method of unmasking the reality of oppression by bringing the poor face to face with the oppressor. The organiser should never be afraid of conflict - it is during moments of conflict that the oppressed lose their feeling of inferiority and begin to feel power in their hands. All agitation and mobilization of the people should sooner or later expose oppressors for what they are, without disguises. Oppressors employ tactics to hide their true selves in order to disarm the oppressed from resisting. Even if oppressors do not care about their image, pressure can still be brought upon them by shaming him before those people whose esteem they want - children and their classmates, their spouses circle, business associates, neighbours, fellow churchgoers, peers.

Difficulties & Opportunities

Organising with people has its particular difficulties, stemming from a) the tactics of the oppressor to avoid confrontation; and b) weaknesses within the oppressed class, as follows:

- * *The oppressor's power comes from his good image*
- * *The oppressor maintains his distance through 'buffers'*
- * *The oppressor always invokes law and order*
- * *The oppressor uses carrot and stick to divide opposition*
- * *The oppressed look down on themselves and avoid decisions*
- * *The oppressed oppress each other/fight amongst themselves*
- * *The oppressed sometimes yield to opportunism*

Organising Principles

Oppression is the opportunity to radicalise people

To take advantage avoid lectures about an abstract vision of the future society - the people have more than enough reasons in their concrete situation to fight. A concrete and detailed knowledge of the establishment must be owned by all, and used to force the oppressor into making mistakes.

Base tactics inside the experience of the oppressed, outside the experience of the oppressor

Tactics must be based on familiar ways, but with a new twist. Experience is a great teacher - the people must learn for themselves - organisers should help create similar experiences so people can grasp the message through reflection on their own experiences. Action should confuse the oppressor, throw him off balance to the oppressed's advantage. Action must therefore be unfamiliar and his consequent clumsy reaction will radicalise people further.

People generally act on the basis of self interest

Problems should be posed in immediate, concrete terms. Afterwards people will have a clearer idea of the significance of their actions, will begin to see liberating acts not simply in terms of their own particular interest but as in the interest of the oppressed as a whole. Knowing where the self-interest of the oppressor lies is important in anticipating his actions.

Move from personal, short-term issues to more complex, abstract, long-term issues.

This applies to organisations and people - it's better to build understanding and combativeness around single or concrete issues and then federate battle-hardened groups together than

than to try to tackle many, complex issues and problems in one organisation or campaign.

The people must make their own decisions

The oppressed must liberate themselves and only they have the ability to do so. Tactics can be suggested on a one-to-one basis prior to any decision. Then ideas will come from the people themselves. The organiser acts as a catalyst without becoming a manipulator. At the same time, people long oppressed will not easily or spontaneously develop ideas or sound tactics; this is the role of the organiser - to suggest, offer information, agitate.

Thoughts On Violence On Demos

The From "What Do We Want?", Class War leaflet 1997.

As a matter of tactics we cannot, most of the time, beat riot cops in a straight fight. We have to ask if it's worth kicking off in a heavily-filmed area, isolated in a middle class paradise, isolated from our neighbourhoods, have natural support and reinforcements, can hide and come back at the cops from backstreets.....

RTS are undoubtedly a bright creative group with an imaginative and subversive attitude to the struggles they are involved in. They have tried to link up young green rebels with groups of workers taking action, with some success. It has to be said though that several actions have ended with a police attack when the majority have gone home. It is surely time for better tactics. A realistic look at the atmosphere would have told us when to retreat and move off as a body, protecting each other, defending the van with the sound system, avoiding the worst batterings. Tactical withdrawal, living to fight another day.....

We should also be aware of the real impact of throwing stuff at police. It's fun, works our anger up and can keep them on the defensive but today's riot gear means not much damage will be done. Obviously it's hard to take loads of petrol bombs into the west end but how about high-powered catapults?



Stupid behavior leads to nickings and battered heads, people doing time. We end up spending time and energy keeping out of the way of these people or running around supporting them when they're arrested. To hit the targets we need to hit to take on the state, we need to think creatively about the whole demo thing. Marching into heavily-policed territory where we can generally expect to lose a fight: isn't this pointless?

Know The Score

STICK TOGETHER

Go with mates, people you trust. Have a list of names somewhere safe with a mate who isn't going. Act as a thinking group, know who's up for what.

MASK UP

If you don't want to get lifted later on, wear a mask up. Also wear plain dark clothes that are tough to identify.

GO EQUIPPED

Junior hacksaws for locks and chains, d-locks for locking up places, paintbombs for visors and cameras

BUNCH UP

A solid line is harder to break than isolated individuals.

UN-ARREST PEOPLE

If someone is snatched they can be won back by a determined small group. If you grab someone back, it's useful to swap clothes to confuse cops looking to rearrest them. Or suggest they move to another area of the fight.

THROWING STUFF

Have some bottle, move up near the front and do it properly or don't do it. People too pissed to throw on target should be stopped, by force if necessary.

FLUFF OFF

If you aren't into the fight or are 'against violence' move out of the area. And if you stand in front of the police protecting them from bottles, you're asking to be hit.

DON'T SAY CHEESE

Attacks on press and TV need to be stepped up. Small groups should decide to do this or take along paintbombs or powerful catapults. Mask up!

LEGAL OBSERVERS

We can all be observers - it's up to us to look out for each other. The official observers in orange bibs are there to help us, to stop people being nicked or doing time. Help them help you; give them names, descriptions of people nicked, statements about what happened.

USE YOUR EYES

Watch what the cops are doing, if they're getting ready to charge. Watch for spotters pointing people out, warn people who've been spotted, move away if you're spotted.

KEEP ON YOUR TOES

Don't stand still, move around. Keep the filth on the run. Avoid dead ends, spread out, stretch the cops

IF YOU GET ARRESTED

Try to make sure people know you've been nicked. DON'T say anything until you're out and with a lawyer. If you've been beaten see a doctor and get injuries photographed.

Organising In The Workplace

From the AF's Programme Document

When it comes to tackling disputes, the union is not on the side of the workers. It's this message that needs to be put across to those we work with. It's our job to push ideas of resistance and the most effective tactics, not to get too involved with the terminally boring and ultimately demoralising machinations of the union. Revolutionaries can't be shop stewards or take other institutionalised roles. On the other hand we don't encourage people to individuals to leave the union as this would make them even more vulnerable and isolated.

Non-Unionised Workplaces

The nature of non-unionised workplaces means that work is usually casual, with minimal job security. Power is wielded arbitrarily by bosses (sometimes) but more usually by a complex 'pecking order' of supervisors and managers. Some will have monthly meetings for workers to voice complaints or suggest ways of improving efficiency. If you stay in such a place long enough a good relationship with your workmates is really important. The level of discontent usually runs high. Unless people don't care if they get the sack or not, workers will keep their resentments to themselves to avoid company grasses. It's our job to fan these flames of discontent but the danger is that someone will want to move things forward by proposing everyone join a union. We should argue against unions because a) they're a waste of time; b) management will probably sack everyone when they find out; c) the benefits aren't worth the fight for recognition; d) the apolitical majority will hold back/outweigh the active minority wanting change. If your workmates decide they are going to unionise, it's best to go along critically while letting people know your disagreements.



Rank-And-File & Syndicalism

Rank-And-File movements have usually tried to put pressure on backsliding union leaders, promote alternative leadership groups or been party-building machines for leftist groups. However they have sometimes grown out of general anger and discontent autonomously. We need to be critically supportive and involved with any autonomous rank-and-file initiatives. It's up to us to point out the limitations of rank-and-file action, warn against reformism and leftist manipulation and point out alternatives. The problem with syndicalism is that to function as a union you have to be accepted by the bosses. Worse, to become a mass organisation, anarcho-syndicalists have to tone down their anarchism or else they will be unable to function. You end with a politicised anarchist minority who

may act as a leadership and a less politicised majority. If you combine legalism with apoliticism, you have a recipe for leadership cliques, class collaboration and betrayal.

Resistance Groups

Resistance groups make no concessions to syndicalism. They are not 'revolutionary unions' but federations of the most militant workers for the purpose of direct action. They aren't a means of collective bargaining but are geared towards making things hot for the bosses via disruption, sabotage etc. If you do work with people who you can trust and who want to fight, then why go legal anyway? We should push the idea of some sort of resistance not constrained by union legality. Resistance groups may be possible if you are or have been involved in some ongoing dispute and/or there is a degree of anger and discontent. Such groups must be anti-capitalist, anti-company, anti-union and have no respect for legality. They need to operate outside the union. They should advocate class war and practice direct action. Such groups would have a propaganda function (pushing resistance and rebellion, slagging management, attacking trade unionism, advocating go-slows, mass sick days etc), and an active function (actually doing or trying to organise what is advocated). They would need to be semi-secret organisations. They are intended not just for AFers or 'revolutionaries' but for angry people who want to nobble the bosses in general, using the most direct and effective means. The important thing is that such groups have no dealings with the unions (though some may be members), have no pretension of becoming an alternative union, and are always external to and against the union.

AF In The Workplace

As with all other areas, if there is more than one AFer in a particular workplace, common agreement on tactics and strategy need to be worked out. We should keep our distance from the Sol. Fed's 'industrial networks' as they advocate alternative unions, similarly the IWW. This doesn't mean we can't work with them in certain circumstances, so long as we remain critical of their alternative union project. If AFers find themselves in the same workplace as other libertarians, we should aim to find common ground we can work on. Collaboration with other libertarians with regard to local strikes and workplace struggles may be possible in terms of supporting the strike but less so in terms of joint propaganda unless there was agreement on direct action as a basis for work. All leftist initiatives should be given a wide berth and their manipulations exposed (though they may contain people sympathetic to real resistance and revolutionary ideas).

From 'So You Think You're A Bit Of An Anarchist?'

Reclaiming ourselves can only occur in areas outside the main focus of capitalist control: our neighbourhoods, campaigns of resistance or protest, autonomous zones and initiatives. This is where we reconnect with the 'unemployed', the 'underclass', the socially excluded. Since work does not depend on employment and freedom is about what we do not how much money we earn, there should be no boundaries between revolutionaries and those laying the foundations for a self-managed society. The need to control our lives, to use our skills in a 'good' cause, to choose who we transact and interact with, to achieve a balance between giving and receiving, to entrust our lives to

So You Think You're A Bit Of An Anarchist?

cont

others, all are central to us as human beings and all can be experienced through work only on a personal or local level, never within a mass society. Inevitably smaller-scale production will spread throughout the free society. The revolution will not be led by an awakened proletariat breaking out of the factory prison but by a radicalised citizenry emptying the factories. Does this mean that people in work can play no part in the revolution? It is likely mass, alienated labour will not lead the revolution. There will be opportunity for strikes and sabotage any time there is a rising tide of rebellion but it is more likely that the worker will join direct actions and movements *outside* her/his workplace. The revolution will re-connect workers and non-workers as people, not classes, it will be made and led by affinity groups sharing common values about work, the environment and social relations, rather than trades unions. These groups will be free associations built on mutual respect rather than associations created by economic necessity.

The Power Of Direct Action

Direct Action may be a protest designed to draw attention to a grievance or injustice. It may be designed to stop actions such as destruction of the environment or attacks by the ruling class. It may be an act of solidarity with a community or individual under attack. But unless it is part of a political strategy for fundamental change it can only be defensive and transient, overwhelmed by the capitalist response and the much greater resources of the ruling class. Direct Action can have positive outcomes even within the framework of capitalism. Forcing the State to bear higher and higher costs (economic, political, social) as it tries to ram a roads-only policy down people's throats has had an effect. But it has not led to sensible and sustainable transport policies. As a type of political protest, Direct Action may be growing but because it is not part of a generalised class struggle it is unlikely to be a real threat to the ruling class in the long-term. It is unlikely to break out of the marginalised and embattled ghetto the media and police state are busy creating for it. The strength of Direct Action is that it is based on ACTIVITY and not simply ideas. It requires higher levels of co-operative communication and interaction, the development of consensus and agreement on the target, the tactic, outcomes and organisation. Based on ideas like autonomy and empowerment, Direct Action avoids disputes and divisions among leadership groups which weaken the struggle and result in a lowest-common denominator approach: leaders make assumptions about what people can and should do in the pursuit of a sterile and entirely fictitious unity. This is most often seen on marches and demos today. No collective consciousness develops because no collective action takes place. No change occurs because the crowd does not act against that which keeps it divided, it remains an assembly of atomised individuals. This is not true if the march comes under attack from the State: then people acting together to defend themselves and each other, out of the control of the leadership, working together, often develop new levels of consciousness and emerge from the fight energised and

empowered. The weakness of Direct Action is that co-operation is rarely sustained or sustainable because there is no *generalised* opposition or resistance - there is no CULTURE OF RESISTANCE. Without a political strategy that makes Direct Action one weapon in a rising tide of anti-State protest it will fail. The measure of this weakness is the relative strength of the Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA) movement. This offers no challenge to Power, proposing instead a principled pacifism that allows and encourages the police to run riot instead of paralysing their will to act through fear. The danger of single-issue campaigning is that people in struggle remain alienated from the struggle for general emancipation and are inevitably either marginalised or reincorporated into capitalism. Direct Action has limited aims and if those aims are achieved, however partially or temporarily, all the energy and rebellion dissipates. Successful Direct Action requires a comprehensive analysis of the enemy's weakness. Particular types of Direct



Action, chosen to exploit these weaknesses, must be flexible enough to meet changing conditions. This flexibility is a tactic and must not become an end in itself - this leads to 'stunt-ism'. Each day of action, each campaign, each new point of confrontation must be understood to be part of a growing and expanding sphere of resistance. But this needs sustaining and prolonging. Local social and mutual aid centres create the space for people actively engaged in resistance to meet and interact on a PERMANENT, ONGOING BASIS. Such interaction helps overcome the artificial divisions capitalism creates. Creating a culture of resistance in which Direct Action would be more effective requires changes of consciousness (for instance people becoming more radical) and permanent change in social relations. Does participation in a squat or roads campaign *fundamentally* and *permanently* overcome alienation and atomisation? Does the change in consciousness lead to a more generalised resistance? Therefore, while we get involved in struggle because very often the struggle is ours as well, anarchists always try to raise consciousness and transform social relations through education, building bridges, positive communication, creating trust, empowering people in ways that (hopefully) leads to an increase in the numbers of people committed on a wide front to permanent struggle.