

THEORY

STRATEGIC NONVIOLENCE

A framework for broad-based direct action emphasizing openness, accountability, and agreements on "how we want to work together this time," designed to build large, inclusive, diverse, and effective movements.

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"A FRAMEWORK OF STRATEGIC NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION MAKES IT EASY TO REJECT PROVOCATION."

For over a decade, questions of violence, property destruction, and confrontational tactics generally have tended to be debated under the frame diversity of tactics, but the time has come to seek a new frame. Diversity of tactics becomes an easy way to avoid wrestling with questions of strategy and accountability. It lets us off the hook from doing the hard work of debating positions and coming to agreements about how we want to act together. It becomes a code for "anything goes," and makes it impossible for our movements to hold anyone accountable for their actions.

A framework that might better serve our purposes is one of strategic nonviolent direct action. Within a strategic nonviolence framework, groups make clear agreements about which tactics to use for a given action. This frame is strategic — it makes no moral judgments about whether or not violence is ever appropriate, it does not demand we commit ourselves to a lifetime of Gandhian pacifism, but it says, "This is how we agree to act together at this time." It is active, not passive. It seeks to create a dilemma for the opposition (see: PRINCIPLE: Put your target in a decision dilemma), and to dramatize the difference between our values and theirs.

Strategic nonviolent direct action has powerful advantages:

We make agreements about what types of action we will take, and hold one another accountable for keeping them. Making agreements is empowering. If I know what to expect in an action, I can make a choice about whether or not to participate. We don't place unwilling people in the position of being held responsible for

RELATED TOOLS

Stories

- Battle in Seattle
- Brazil's Free Fare Movement
- Bring Back Our Girls
- Citizens' Posse
- Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army
- Occupy Wall Street
- Round Dance Revolution
- Schools of Struggle
- The Salt March
- #YouStink

Tactics

- Carnival protest
- Civil disobedience
- Jail solidarity
- Mass street action
- Occupation

Principles

- Anger works best when you have the moral high ground
- Consensus is a means, not an

acts they did not commit and do not support.

In the process of coming to agreements, we listen to each other's differing viewpoints. We don't avoid disagreements within our group, but learn to debate freely, passionately, and respectfully.

We organize openly, without fear, because we stand behind our actions. We may break laws in service to the higher laws of conscience. We don't seek punishment, nor admit the right of the system to punish us, but we face the potential consequences for our actions with courage and pride.

Because we organize openly, we can invite new people into our movements and they can continue to grow. As soon as we institute a security culture in the midst of a mass movement, the movement begins to close in upon itself and to shrink.

Though a framework of nonviolent direct action does not make us safe, it does let us make clear decisions about what kinds of actions we put ourselves at risk for. That said, we can't control what the police do and they need no direct provocation to attack us (see: PRINCIPLE: Take risks, but take care).

A framework of strategic nonviolent direct action makes it easy to reject provocation. We know what we've agreed to — and anyone urging other courses of action can be reminded of those agreements or rejected.

There's plenty of room in this struggle for a diversity of movements and a diversity of organizing and actions. Some may choose strict Gandhian nonviolence, others may choose emphatic resistance. But for movements that embrace it, strategic nonviolent direct action is a framework that will allow broad-based movements to grow in diversity and power.

Originally published in Beautiful Trouble.

LEARN MORE

An Open Letter to the Occupy Movement: Why We Need Agreements

Alliance for Community Trainers, 2011

<http://trainersalliance.org/open-letter-to-the-occupy-movement-why-we-need-agreements/>

end

- Define "hardcore" strategically
- Escalate strategically
- If protest is made illegal, make daily life a protest
- One no, many yesses
- Put your target in a decision dilemma
- Take risks, but take care
- The real action is your target's reaction
- Use others' prejudices against them
- Use your radical fringe to shift the Overton window
- Would you like some structure with your momentum?

Theories

- Action logic
- Al faza'a (a surge of solidarity)
- Baltajiah (thugs)
- Expressive and instrumental actions
- Hamoq and hamas
- Prefigurative politics
- Revolutionary nonviolence
- The tactics of everyday life

Methodologies

- Pillars of power
- SMART objectives
- Spectrum of allies

TAGS

Campaign strategy,
Communications, Direct action,
Nonviolence