

Curious George Brigade

Insurrectionary Mutual Aid

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From Mobilizations to Insurrectory Mutual Aid

While too many anarchists wring their hands about the end of the rollicking anti-globalization mobilizations of the last decade, others are conspiring a resistance of direct action in places where we have a chance to win. The truth is that while we learned many valuable organizational and tactical lessons during the years after Seattle, most of our energy was spent on largely symbolic actions. The real strength of these mobilizations was actually in the organizing: the ability to awaken many people to the possibility of resistance to global capitalism, as well as providing a catalyst for regional and international networks. At no point did these mobilizations actually threaten to end world capitalism or seriously challenge State power. or even liberate any socio-geographical territory. As anarchists, now is not the time to mourn the death of “anti-globe” mobilizations, but move to the next phase of our resistance — Insurrectory Mutual Aid.

Insurrection — *an organized rebellion aimed at overthrowing a constituted government through the use of subversion, sabotage and direct resistance -calling in question the legitimacy and efficacy of the government.*

It is through acting and learning to act that we will open a path to insurrection. Propaganda does have a role, but that role is limited to clarifying actions not inciting them, since its context is dependent on the actions of people. Simply put: waiting only teaches waiting; in acting one learns to act.

The force of an insurrection is not the state’s military response, but the social upheaval it generates. Beyond the surface of the armed clash, the importance of any particular revolt should be evaluated by how it managed to expand the paralysis of normality in a given area and beyond. The Zapatistas are a recent example of this. Their limited military clash, less than ten days long and 150 people killed, with the government at San Cristobal on New Year’s day 1994 was an example of insurrection. It was a success, not because of a stunning military victory, but because it was able to disrupt normality in Chiapas which is still going on to this day. Recently the Zapatistas have used this base in Chiapas to launch a new challenge to the legitimacy of the Mexican State and have expanded beyond Chiapas.

It is this potential expansion that gives an insurrection its power and drives the fear behind the state’s reaction. In a crisis or emergency situation, fortune favors the rebel, since, crises are by nature (if only temporarily) beyond the control of government forces. Governments have numerous contingencies to deal with a variety of “acceptable variations” [actual term used in FEMA documents] however they lack imagination and the lumbering bureaucracy that dominates

all governments make it difficult to react to new situations. If it falls outside their imaginations they are at a loss to improvise. It can be a short step from emergency to the emergence of self-organized resistance. Argentina is one recent example of how an economic crisis can transform itself into a real counter-force to capitalism and the state.

Mutual Aid — *a voluntary giving or lending of resources, labor or goods to others in a shared community/communities with the expectation that the entire community will in turn benefit.*

Mutual Aid is a concept that is familiar to many anarchists, but often not fully understood. Mutual aid is not charity nor is it some baroque bartering system. It rejects the “tit-for-tat” psychology of modern capitalism while challenging the nightmare of communist distribution. Mutual aid is freely given help (in the form of services and resources) to others in our community. The idea is that as individuals in the community help each other the entire community benefits and that in turn supports the individuals own goals. It is not dissimilar to the simple concept of sharing. Mutual aid, like charity, central communism and capitalism, promotes a specific ideological system. In the case of mutual aid it supports a libertarian ideology where individuals are trusted to make economic decisions that promote the entire community.

The state and its flunkies work from a position that charity is an effective tool to re-establish the status quo. In its most recent report on Katrina, FEMA summarized the state’s logic on providing assistance to affected people: “All aid should be used strategically. The use of sustainable supplies must be administered in such a way to maximize compliance with the emergency plan. Unfortunately, this may delay some aid but the primacy of maintaining control in the first few days can not be underestimated.”

It comes as no surprise that our leaders are willing to let us die while they implement their misguided plans to maintain law and order. It is during this period of government hesitation that we need to be on the ground providing real solidarity for those the state is afraid of and indifferent to. Solidarity is more than holding protests, organizing fundraisers and filing indymedia reports. Real solidarity requires commitment, risk and preparedness. Mutual aid is a direct challenge to the government and the associated NGOs and religious institutions that monopolize “helping people.” Mutual aid by necessity promotes an egalitarian relationship between individuals and groups, where charity and government aid have buttress hierarchical relationships of dependence (at best) and oppression (more often). Through the solidarity of mutual aid, we can show our commitment

to those excluded by the government emergency managers and truly reclaim the tactic of *Propaganda by the Deed*.

However, to be effective we need to prepare now. The influx of supplies and labor to locally affected communities — that we share affinity with — could mean the difference between the streets of Argentina and the stadiums of Louisiana. We must be prepared if a crisis happens tomorrow. A crisis is not the time to have fundraisers to get initial supplies. We need to be work on getting these things now, so when an emergency occurs, we can act immediately.

Showing up during a crisis is not like summit hopping. Any insurrectionist needs to be self-sufficient in the basics and have ready access to extra supplies of: food, water, medications, power, communications and shelter. It should be obvious in emergency situations one can not simply arrive and expect to plug-in to an already organized network. Unprepared radicals can actually put a strain on scarce resources by showing up unprepared. When hundreds of well-intentioned college kids flooded New Orleans during their spring break; it did not turn out to be the boon organizers first had hopped for. The students came without adequate clothes, food, water, shelter and so on. One organizer spent an entire afternoon tracking down some medication for a student who had assumed they could they important prescription filled at a local drugstore. The organizers were swamped with the logistics of supporting these hundreds of volunteers and organizing them to do meaningful and much needed work. The Food Not Bombs people provide a positive example on how groups of people can organize themselves and be adequately prepared enough so the focus can be on the work that needs to be done. In the weeks following the hurricane more than a hundred Food Not Bomb and related volunteers served thousands of meals to those in need. They had their own shelter, communications and supplies. The local communities did not need to waste limited energy and resources on these volunteers.

An insurrectionary must also be prepared to deal with real risk. Anti-Globalization mobilizations did a good job of training and preparing us for possible arrests and police brutality. Even though the majority of protesters were never arrested or beaten with billy-clubs, the very real possibility of state violence allowed one to decide what levels of risk one was willing to engage in with their affinity groups. We need to be just as honest and talk with those in our affinity groups about what level of risk we are willing to crisis mobilizations. During emergencies all sorts of laws change and the risk of arrests are greatly heightened along with real violence from the state and others. Real solidarity is taking similar risks as those most affected, not just sitting on the side-lines wishing they luck.

Insurrectory Mutual Aid is difficult high risk activity that requires a substantial of resources and preparedness. It is reasonable to ask if this tactics is worth it. As anarchists, the revolution is our constant point of reference, precisely because it

is a concrete event; it must be built daily through more modest attempts which do not have all the liberating characteristics of the social revolution in the true sense. These more modest attempts are insurrections. In them the uprising of the most exploited and excluded of society and the most politically sensitized minority opens the way to the possible involvement of increasingly wider strata of exploited on a flux of rebellion which could lead to revolution. It is never possible to see the outcome of a specific struggle in advance. Even a limited struggle can have the most unexpected consequences. The passage from the various insurrections — limited and circumscribed — to revolution can never be guaranteed in advance by any method.

Below are some advantages and difficulties involved in practicing Insurrectory Mutual Aid:

The Advantages of Insurrectory Mutual Aid

- Crisis allows us to refocus and put our energies back into direct action.
- Connects us with folks that may have never heard about anarchism.
- Challenge the State and the capitalists on a more even playing field.
- Allow us to test out our assumptions about how societies can be organized along anarchist principles.
- Reinvigorate our anarchist networks by coming together for crisis mobilizations.
- Provide more permanent socio-geographic areas for further resistance.
- Access to public exposure.
- Fighting for something, instead of against things.
- Learn a new skill set that may be more appropriate for wide-spread militant resistance.

Difficulties

- The stakes are much higher; people could get into serious trouble.
- The events are spontaneous (as oppose to scheduled events) so it is harder to plan for.
- Requires greater mobility
- Requires decisiveness. There is often only a small window of opportunity.
- Greater demand on a functioning inter-network communications system. Insurrectionaries need to develop a real-time multiply redundant communications system beyond just the internet.

- Often requires complex logistics.
- Means working in areas that may have entrenched and baroque internal interests and politics — which we may know very little about.
- Greater need for self-sufficiency.

Mutual Aid is not charity! It is an attack!

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