Curious George Brigade
The Inefficient Utopia or How Consensus Will Change the World
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be based on friendship and autonomy, not on a slavish following of leaders, platforms, or abstract dogmas. Each person in an affinity group must account for their actions, words, and deeds to their most trusted comrades. We reject the blame game and accusations so common in efficient groups. With each person accepting full responsibility for their actions, no one can have any more of the blame than any one else. Let's all be accountable to ourselves, so we can grow and learn from our mistakes and be buoyed by our successes. It takes time to understand people, to develop friendships and trust. It is naive to think that by proclaiming a platform or points of unity we can develop trust and solidarity with strangers. Politics should not be tied to some abstract time line divined by leaders or musty books but to our own instincts and desires! Demand the time to think, form meaningful relationships, and enjoy the journey. For any chance at success, we must love each other more than our enemy hates us. To these ends, our inefficiency is our weapon.

Over and over again, anarchists have been critiqued, arrested, and killed by "fellow-travelers" on the road to revolution because we were deemed inefficient. Trotsky complained to his pal Lenin that the anarchists in charge of the railways were 'inefficient devils'. Their lack of punctuality will derail our revolution." Lenin agreed, and in 1919, the anarchist Northern Rail Headquarters was stormed by the Red Guard and the anarchists were "expelled from their duties." Charges of inefficiency were not only a matter of losing jobs for anarchists, but an excuse for the authorities to murder them. Even today, anarchist principles are condemned roundly by those on the Left as simply not efficient enough. We are derided because we would rather be opening a squat or cooking big meals for the hungry than selling newspapers. These criticisms from the larger activist scene have had scurrilous effects. More disturbing than these outside attacks, anarchists have begun to internalize and repeat this criticism. Some have attempted to gain efficiency with such means as officers, federations, and voting. All of this is done to scare away the hobgoblin of inefficiency that has dogged anarchism for so long.

Don't believe the hype.

Instead, rejoice in inefficiency and rightfully reject the idol-worship of the Ford Factory of political change. Efficiency is the hallmark of modern life in North America: from fast food drive-ins to well-regulated police states. Efficiency is the coin of the realm for soulless structures like the International Monetary Fund and the earth destroying agribusiness industry. The desire to 'do more in less time' is not a neutral force in our culture; it is the handmaiden of miserable experts, specialists, and leaders.

Not everyone has rushed to become efficient. Something else exists on the periphery: an inefficient utopia, a culture of consensus, collectives, and do-it-yourself ethics. A place where time is not bought, sold, or leased, and no clock is the final arbiter of our worth. For many people in North America, the problem is not just poverty but lack of time to do the things that are actually meaningful. This is not a symptom of personal failures but the consequence of a time-obsessed society. Today, desire

for efficiency springs from the scarcity model which is the foundation of capitalism. Time is seen as a limited resource when we get caught up in meaningless jobs, mass-produced entertainment, and the common complaint of activists' tedious meetings. So let's make the most of our time! In our politics and projects, anarchists have rightly sought to find meaning in the journey, not merely in the intended destinations. Inefficiency allows us the opportunity to seek out our affinities and engage in meaningful work without the sands of time burying our ideals. Despite the advice of high school counselors and computer graded exams, it takes time to know what you really want to do with your life.

In the efficient dystopia that is North America, "Time is Money." Yet there is never enough time or money for what we really need. Our communities of resistance have rightly placed a great deal of emphasis on exchanging skills and knowledge through do-it-yourself (DIY) workshops, trainings, rendezvous and convergences. As opposed to the corporate or academic models, DIY skill sharing requires time-consuming encounters that create genuine relationships based on friendship and mutual trust. In the pursuit of efficiency, meaningful relationships like these are replaced by professionalization and reliance on specialists. Do we really need "professional" facilitators to run our meetings? In contrast to skill sharing, professionalized relationships leave all parties cold and lacking, whether the transaction involves having your car repaired or receiving vital health care. Both the consumer and specialist are cheating themselves of the opportunity to learn new skills and befriend new people. The specialist becomes trapped in doing what she is good at or specialized in, and rarely what she actually wants to do. Equally trapped, the consumer loses her own autonomy when relationships are reduced to efficient monetary exchanges. This alienated consumer works against her own interests; she knows little about who she is bankrolling. She may be saving her money in a bank that is lending it to the real-estate gentrifiers that are destroying her local neighborhood and raising her rent. Often we repeat these capitalistic interactions in our communities of resistance, giving our time and money to organizations we know almost nothing about. A rogue member of the Curious George Brigade was recently hit up for a donation by a volunteer of the giant anti-war coalition who was toting around a giant garbage bag, in the streets, during the actual

messages across, our communication becomes simultaneously more honest and more complex. The tricks used by capitalist advertisements to fool us into buying their newest product can be transformed into weapons in our hands for dismantling this system. A sexist billboard selling Coors is changed into a demand for veganism, perplexing passing motorists. Books of propaganda become more meaningful when their pages get ripped out, photocopied, stolen, reinterpreted, edited, and passed on.

Tactical Inefficiency

"You are a bunch of anti-organizationalists, and we are fighting to win" is a recent critique on those who share some of our tactics in the activist world. Activists who pursue efficiency would have us believe that anarchist principles may be fine for an ideal world or even after the comfortably far off Revolution, but for now they are unpractical, selfish, and dangerous. These activists march smugly under the faded banners of political discipline, efficiency, and sensibility. What is so ironic is that these marching groups are often the least effective groups on the streets, at least as far as social and political change is concerned. Thirty-odd years of marching around with signs in America has made little progress against the onslaught of capitalist and state power. Maybe it's time to try something different? It certainly won't be easy. Our enemies are unified enough to throw major obstacles in our way. They have armies, media, money, resources, jails, religions, and countless other tools at their disposal to stop any revolutionary change that risks upsetting their current positions of power. Our inefficient models are the most meaningful way of ensuring that we maximize our opportunities. Consensus allows us to use all the ideas of all participants. It is worth the time to make sure our projects have the greatest chance of success by listening to everyone's opinion and taking them seriously. We will need all of our skills, resources and creativity to resist them, remake our own lives and society.

Only in groups where they feel valued, trusted, and secure will people be willing to take the time to present unpopular views and suggestions that will determine the outcome of a project. Responsibility ought to

and leaderless "affinity groups." It became an example of the challenges that hierarchical organizations face when confronting networked adversaries with faster reaction cycles. This loosely organized coalition, embracing network organization, and tactics, frustrated police efforts to gain the situational awareness needed to combat the seemingly chaotic Seattle disturbances."

We're definitely doing something right!

Inefficient Propaganda

The demand for quality experiences is an important propaganda tool in a society that produces meaningless quantity: a billion television channels with nothing on. One of the challenges we face is to transform a society of passive consumers into active and creative participants in their own futures, by any means necessary.

Opening the flows of communication is key to creating anarchy. Graffiti, zines, pirate radio, subvertisements, billboard defacements, and web-sites may not reach the large audiences of mass media but their impact is often more lasting on both the producers and the audience. As more people take control of "the message", more voices are heard. This decentralization of message and medium creates a culture of propagandists ruthlessly pirating and creating information to form their own messages. The difference between consumer and producer shrinks when everyone can have their voice heard. This is the central concept behind the Independent Media Centers. Eventually, the entire dichotomy breaks down as media skills are learned and shared. It's actually more impressive to see thousands of diverse voices each expressing a unique perspective on their current situation than the same mass-produced issue-of-the-week signs that are given away by organizers at every large march.

Anarchists seek not only to increase their audiences but also to increase the diversity of mediums and people who have the ability to reach audiences. By creating a culture of propagandists skilled in getting their

demonstration! When asked where that big bag of money would actually wind up, the volunteer shrugged her shoulders and candidly answered, "You know, to be honest, I don't know. I just follow directions." Needless to say, we wound up donating our money to the bail fund instead. In life and activism, we should know who we are working with; otherwise voluntary association is just a slogan. All of this takes time.

Inefficiency rots away the ideological foundations of the modern capitalist State. Workers know that politically motivated inefficiency (e.g. work-slowdowns) is an important tool to gain power in the workplace. Imagine extending the work-slowdown to the political process and to every facet of society. Political inefficiency can be an important tool for checking authoritarian tendencies in larger groups. For example, at an impersonal, businesslike meeting, you can reject a predetermined plan of action by organizers and demand time and a venue to discuss real alternatives. Too many times activists have been strong-armed into poorly made, myopic plans created by tiny groups and self-appointed leaders. It is necessary to reject prepackaged politics the same way we reject prepackaged food in favor of a home cooked meal made with friends.

Political Inefficiency

Consensus may take more time than voting, but then voting is not as time-efficient as totalitarianism. What little is gained in efficiency is usually at the cost of genuine participation and autonomy. At its very core, consensus demands participation and input from the entire community. In an environment of mutual trust, consensus is one of the few decision-making models that truly rejects authority while protecting the autonomy of individuals and small groups. When consensus works, everyone can participate and all desires are taken into account. And while there is no magic formula for creating a good meeting or social interaction, we should never sacrifice our ideals and politics for false unity. We talk of maintaining biodiversity and ethnic diversity, but what about political and tactical diversity? When the voice of every minority, faction, or individual is sacrificed in the name of efficiency, the horizon

of our politics shrinks. When people are sidelined, we all lose out. Never confuse efficiency with effectiveness.

One of the most inefficient utopias I have ever seen was that of a humble Zapatista village in the mountains of Southeastern Mexico. I kid you not, the entire village sits down and takes days to make a single decision! Everyone gets a chance to hear and be heard, and some questions take eons of time, but everyone is patient and respectful. Things actually get done. It's as if time was suddenly transformed from the ticking of a Newtonian clock to something that revolved around ordinary folks.

> Mexican peasants, under the constant threat of government extermination, take time to decide everything by consensus. It isn't strange to them to discuss problems and issues until everyone can agree on a decision. I hope to live in a society where we can take time to show each other how we all really do matter. Instead of reaching only for meetings with thousands of people in the U.S., we can replicate this process with small groups of friends. Consensus is not a two-hour meeting with everything decided beforehand! It's the time spent to discuss and understand issues of real importance, a tactical method for building networks that are stronger than anything hierarchy could ever offer. With enough time, we will accomplish things with "villages" of hundreds, even thousands. This will produce consensus that doesn't seek to impose uniformity, but foster and create alliances which celebrate differences. I can only imagine the possibilities.
>
> — Regina de Bray, anarchist adventurer and professional amateur

Inefficient Organization

Affinity groups (AGs) tend to be less efficient than armies, hierarchical organizations, and other mass-based organizational models. By their very structure, AGs take every individual's opinion seriously. This is a much less efficient principle of organization than a party whose leaders make decisions unilaterally. What AGs lack in size, efficiency, and

mobilization of resources, they more than make up for in participation, genuine experiences, and solidarity. The dinosaurs on the

Left tell us that we must get armies, seize government power, and most of all, be state-like in order to "win." Why should we let the State set the terms of our resistance anyway? Anarchists can come up with more flexible strategies. Our networks gladly lack a precise platform of principles and unceasing meetings. Instead, we have irregular gatherings, rendezvous for specific projects, multiple skills, solid friendships, and limitless ambitions unconstrained by organizational hierarchies. Through these networks of trust, people can feel comfortable with the most outrageous of actions while receiving the care and warmth needed to carry on. They may not be ageless and permanent, but these models rarely outlive their usefulness, unlike formal parties and other efficient organizations which lumber on into irrelevancy.

We don't need to preplan every contingency in an attempt to be super humanly efficient. Anarchists take care of each other and our friends. A group of bands get together to hold a benefit show for a local group of strikers and move on after the money is given to those in need. These relationships can be mutually beneficial, perhaps those musicians might need the strikers to help defend their squat next week!

This is in stark contrast to many organizations that collect monthly dues to hide away in war-chests waiting for the "right time" to spend it. Inefficient organizations allow each individual to express themselves to the fullest of their abilities in cooperation with others, unlike large groups where most people are just another face in the crowd. Our networks do not need to have officers, a manifesto, or necessarily even a name. Can such networks pose a significant alternative to the established political system? Just a few years ago the military's pet think-tank RAND Corp. wrote this about the unpermitted, unscripted elements of the N30 demos in Seattle:

> "Anarchists, using extremely good modern communications, including live internet feeds, were able to execute simultaneous actions by means of pulsing and swarming tactics coordinated by networked