

# ATR ACTIVISM



up that determine the direction and the function of the group. These issues should also be discussed in terms of assessing the situation and the desires and motivations of each activist.

### ***D. 1. Traditional Methods of Protest***

Group activists work through many traditional channels of organized protest. Organizing demonstrations, petition drives, boycotts, mailings, teach-ins, or printing a newspaper are all traditional ways that groups choose to resist our system. The value and effectiveness of traditional protest methods needs to be evaluated by each group though before committing themselves to pursuing nontraditional forms of resistance like street-fighting, riots, guerilla warfare, bombings, etc.

### ***D. 2. Legal v. Illegal Activities***

Group projects can involve legal or illegal means of accomplishing the group's goals. As a starting point, groups decide whether or not they will engage in illegal activities and whether changing circumstances will also change the group's mind. Recognizing the consequences for the individual activists if they are caught, the group needs to evaluate the commitment and motivation of each member and discuss tactical issues of secrecy, going undercover, trust, and law enforcement retaliation. A knowledge of the local state, and federal laws as well as the court system is also helpful to groups engaging in illegal activities.

### ***D. 3. The Media?***

Should the group make use of the media? Which media (mainstream or underground, print or tv) should the group tap into? In the group discussion of this issue, we recognize that the media has its own agenda and will pursue this by the way that they "spin" stories. How the media presents a group, what pictures, quotes, or sound-bites they use and where they locate the group's issues on the public spectrum are all questions the group must address if they choose to use the media. On a deeper level, the group first decides if they are going to solicit popular support for their projects, and if so, what must they do to gain the kind of support they need.

### ***D. 4. Coalition Building and Solidarity Groups***

Part of the task of building popular support is being able to build coalitions and solidarity ties with other activist organizations. The exact procedure of coalition building is worked out by the group with other groups that may share similar visions or tactics, or that have a resource availability (funds, ideas, labor power, media) that our group may want to share. Yet in building coalitions, the group must give up some of its own autonomy to work with and support these other activists. How important to the group is resources that another group could offer? Finally, how important is it to network and organize with and around the actions of other activists?

## **III. The Intersections for a Revolution**

A combination of a lifestyle of activism and participation in group projects fulfills the two pronged attack that works toward social change. How can

## **Activism**

This pamphlet is about our roles as politicized actors. This is about punks and politics. It is an explanation and a criticism of two different forms of activism, lifestyle activism and group activism. It is an attempt to analyze the ways we try to change our world—our struggles, our victories, and our failures. It is also a recognition of the difficulty and the contradictions involved in actively resisting our system. Finally, it is a call to network and communicate for those kids involved in destroying the system and building an alternative to our world, it is a critical analysis of where we are, where we are going, and what may help us get there.

If we really believe in fighting for a better world, our resistance must be in our minds using our imaginations to criticize existing life and discover better ways to live. And it must be through our actions—in the real world, in our everyday lives, practicing our criticisms and working with others for a change, for a REVOLUTION that includes more than just ourselves.

## **I. Lifestyle Activism**

### ***A. An Attempt at a Definition?***

We all know what we are talking about here. A lifestyle devoted to change, a way of living where we look toward the future by living our lives NOW in a revolutionary way. Veganism, reducing our commodity consumption, environmentalism, stealing dumpsters, squatting, not wearing animals, using political knowledge to shop for our commodities where we buy our groceries, records, clothes, books, etc.—fostering critical and intimate relationships with our friends where we deconstruct all the isms of our culture, making our "private" lives public, through the networks of zines/spoken word/scenes/gossip. . . (Help me think of some others)

### ***B. Positive Aspects***

Making the personal political is our way of saying that our lifestyles look toward a future society. In this way, we begin to feel like we are actually making a change, on a local, minute level where we resist the overwhelming and dominating influence of institutional capitalism. Through lifestyle activism, those of us who are critical of our world try to find ANY way to resist.

### ***B. 1. Interconnectedness***

Lifestyle activism, through the rhetoric we've developed and sometimes in our actual practice, opposes the capitalist ideology that we are all separate, isolated individuals and that nothing we do has any effect on others. Through our lifestyles we come to recognize the complex and deep connections our actions have on a world around us. We begin to realize that how we live our lives on a day to day level, CAN and DOES effect a change on the world around us. Whether it is on a microlevel, like the development of our personal relationships, fighting our own acculturated sexism or homophobia or objectification of others for profit, or on a macro-level

discussions revolve around how the group is “run” and who will be involved in the group. Membership can be open to all or restricted to a select few. Restrictions on membership can be because of group secrecy or because of issues of identity or “safe” space, where the members decide who is to be involved.

### **B. 1. Leadership?**

Do we need “leaders” at all in group situations? This is the initial question of leadership, for the assumption that underlies a dependence upon leadership is that some of us are better suited to be followers than leaders. Yet at the same time, how is group work to be carried out? How will the group be efficient and productive in their goals and actions without a “leader?” We can recognize that people have differing skill, knowledge, and backgrounds that they bring to a group without also valuing a certain skill, knowledge or background above all others. There are many ways to diffuse the issue of leadership in group situations: by keeping the decision-making power in the hands of all group members, by a constant analysis and discussion of inner-group dynamics, and by each individual exercising a restraint on their own tendencies toward “leading” others.

### **B. 2. Decision Making**

The basic everyday issues of running the group are defined by the decision-making process. If each member is to take part in running the group, working as an equal and valued member, the type of decision-making process that will be used guarantees equal access and participation by all. Depending upon the kind of decision-making the group uses, the process may involve traditional or nontraditional methods of group interaction. First, the group decides how it will decide.

#### **B. 2. a. Majority**

Majority decision-making consists of a traditional process of group interaction where the issues are decided by a group vote, with the majority of votes resolving the issue. Often this process is formalized by using rules of order where a chairperson presides over the meeting, acknowledges questions by the members, cuts off debate when deemed appropriate and calls for a final vote, where the decision is ultimately made. This process can be participatory for all members by rotating the chairperson duties and allowing debate of a viewpoints. A group run by majority tends toward efficiency in establishing agendas and accomplishing tasks, yet the group also runs the risk of silencing a viewpoint by consistently outvoting the minority.

#### **B. 2. b. Consensus**

An activist group run by consensus decision-making is often characterized by long, drawn out sessions of discussion where issues are analyzed until all of the group members reach a similar stance on the issue. Action is taken, not by vote, but by general agreement of all the members. This process is directly participatory, as each member argues and compromises her/his viewpoint in accordance with the discussion among the general group, Consensus decision-making often does not have the kind of formalized

takes precedence over any kind of group work or long-term revolution, yet at the same time this lifestyle is “punk” or “rebellious,” the justification for political apathy.

### **C. 1. a. Existentialism or Choose Your Own Reality**

A philosophical grounding in existentialism, or the idea that we all can choose our own realities, often serves to justify the lifestyle activist’s hesitation to join in more traditional forms of group activism. Using this philosophy, we turn inward, severing the REAL existent ties with other human beings for a stance that gravitates toward isolation and nihilism. The “existential human” can then only make her/his own life because the world is absurd and forever unchangeable, and nothing can be done toward a long-term project of “revolution.” We are then separated again from the struggles of others, capitalist ideology, the belief that our own individual survival or comfort is more important than the survival of all, again legitimates our existentialist alienation from others.

### **C. 1. b. Cynicism and Inaction**

After working and resisting in a lifestyle we believe to be revolutionary, we often see that our actions are not having the kind of consequences that we had hoped. We forget that revolution is a lifelong process, a generational project, and we begin to think that our actions do not make that much of a difference. Perhaps we hope for change on a large scale and we see that our lifestyles have no real impact on national policy, perhaps we do not see the consequences of our actions on a local level—we become cynical and defeated, no longer hoping, no longer working at our resistance and opposition.

### **C. 2. Moral Superiority**

Often when we fight so desperately and so hard to resist our society, we come to believe that we are better than others who just don’t “know” as much as us. We think that we are taking the moral high ground and it is our job, no, our responsibility to preach our gospel to others. We preach our lifestyle as the example all should follow and often our intolerance for other lifestyles leads us into antagonism with potential allies. Instead of resisting the kind of group mentality that capitalism teaches us, we form our own groups, our own gangs, our own armies, and seek out those within our own movements and communities we think are not living the kind of MORAL life that we think we are living. This again fragments us. Those not living our “morally superior” lifestyles are ostracized, those who try to live the lifestyle, fear those in our groups who would jump on any deviation of the lifestyle. Thus they are continually working to perfect the lifestyle, not perfect their world as a whole by living this lifestyle.

### **D. The Contradictions of Lifestyle Activism**

I think that in almost every instance of lifestyle activism, there will be inherent contradictions that will arise if a lifestyle becomes an end, not a means toward change. Conflicts in our rhetoric and our ideas that will arise as we try to practice our lifestyle separate from any long-term project

we be examples of a revolutionary lifestyle without also working with others toward a long-term project of revolution? We must make some compromises just to survive in this system, yet where do we resist and how far can we go? In spite of this paradox, we must learn how to simultaneously work within the system to build alternatives of production and alternatives of ideology that will sustain a NEW world. While also working to actively destroy and debilitate the institutions and the ideologies that sustain our system, we must consolidate our victories and remember our history. This is the task. Are you down?

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(like the decrease of the consumption of animal products), lifestyle activism reconnects our personal lives to a larger political whole.

## ***B. 2. Reintroduction of subjective Action***

As we get older, jaded, tired and fed up with resisting our society, lifestyle activism keeps us mindful of our power as an individual actor—we are neither the isolated individual whose action does not matter, nor are we only able to be as a part of a “revolutionary class,” where our individual actions are meaningless unless they are part of a mass action by a “unified” class.

## ***B. 3. Knowledge and Action***

How do we imagine we would live in a better world? Can we think about a world where human happiness and a fundamental respect for others would be of value rather than profit or greed? If so, even in imagining this world we are taking a critical stance toward our own world a step toward finding the links and the interconnections that make the capitalist system work as a WHOLE. Knowledge is the first step to action, when we understand that our actions have consequences outside our own lives, we also realize that the actions of others, of corporations, of nation-states, have many complex and interconnected effects on our everyday lives. Our knowledge serves as a background for our action that in imagining a better life, we are also responsible for creating that life. The way we live our lifestyle, how we play out the everyday opportunities for resistance, these things will begin to build the foundations for a different existence not just for the few of us privileged to live this lifestyle—but for all.

## ***C. Negative Aspects***

To live a certain lifestyle is not enough in our efforts to change the world. Because of the contradictions involved in trying to live and survive in our system, our idealized goals of lifestyle activism often begin to return to what we criticized in the first place. We become self-involved, isolated from each other by our lifestyles (crust v. struggle v. emo v. whatever), and opening just enough space for us to live comfortably. By neglecting other aspects of activism, lifestyle activism turns inward—just like the counterculture of the 60's, the lifestyle becomes the focus, not changing ourselves and our world.

### ***C. 1. Lifestyle Activism as End not Means***

Lifestyle activists often fall into the self-absorbed trap of seeing the lifestyle as an end in itself rather than a means to a better society. Overwhelmed by a world that seems impossible to change, lifestyle activists often feel that change on a macro-level is impossible. The only solution left then, is to change what little part of their own world they can. As they become more isolated and lifestyle becomes the primary focus of their activism, these folks may begin to consolidate a position of COMFORT in this world. While living a material life not that different from the ones they criticize, lifestyle activism turns into just another trend peppered with revolutionary rhetoric. The pursuit of short-term individual comfort and commodities

rules of majority debate can continue on for hours until all members are convinced of the consensus. Yet this process allows those skilled in rhetoric to influence a decision and often results in much unnecessary debate.

### ***B. 2. c. Autonomous Activity***

In a group run by autonomous decision making, each member sets her/his own goals and agendas and uses the resources of the group to their projects in a more or less autonomous manner. These groups are very loosely knit and group cooperation centers on being an “ally” to each member's projects rather than working together as a whole. By this approach, individual motivation and initiative grows from the support of the group—the autonomous activity of each member allows them the time to devote to their projects, yet when needed, they can ask for another's assistance. Autonomous decisionmaking is ideal for groups engaged in illegal activities and for groups that prioritize secrecy. Finally, individual activists can use this type of group orientation to gain temporary support of their activities.

## ***C. Inner Group Dynamics***

For a group to function and fulfill any potential for activism, the group members should be consistently engaged in a dialogue over inner-group dynamics. The efficiency and even the existence of the group are at stake in the ebbs and flows of the individual members personal relationships. Often the process of decisionmaking will dictate the amount of group time spent on discussing group dynamics—groups run by consensus will obviously devote more time to this process than autonomously active groups.

### ***C. 1. The Political is Personal***

Working on interpersonal relationships as a part of group discussion may seem irrelevant or a waste of time, yet, this reinforces our belief in personal lives having political consequences. Groups interested in their revolutionary potential also need to realize that intra-group squabbles based on personal disagreements are counterproductive. Often some of the ideologies an activist group is ostensibly fighting, reappear through personal problems—power struggles, egos, sexism or racism are issues that are sometimes played out in the flows of group dynamics. The lines are often difficult to draw between what is private (if anything, as is sometimes the case in collective living situations) and what should be publicly discussed by the group.

### ***C. 2. Clearinghouses***

As a part of a group agenda, we make time for “clearinghouses” when personal relationships are discussed, grievances are aired and issues of what is public and what is private are dealt with. The group decides what is “going too far” in these discussions, what procedures should be developed for dealing with inner-group tensions and when discussion should be furthered or shut down.

## ***D. Practical and Tactical Issues***

In organizing an activist group, a number of practical or tactical issues crop

of social change, separate from the struggles of others. These contradictions are a result of trying to live in a system rife with contradictions, yet at the same time trying to resist the system. If we do not have a coherent goal, a long-term plan of imagination that we try to realize through our lifestyle, our activism becomes just another phase of rebellion, just another commodity that capitalism can sell on the open market, or just another ghetto where we can contemplate our navels, consolidate our comfort and live our lives without any hope for real change.

## II. Group or Organized Activism

### A. An Attempt at a Definition?

A group of individuals, committed to working together toward practical and theoretical goals not addressed by our system or by other groups, gathers to participate, not only in the work of the group, but also in decision making and devising goals. The group's practical and theoretical goals may center around a variety of specific ideas or actions—actions that the group hopes will reinforce or act as a catalyst for some type of change in our social system. Group Activism relies upon the commitment of group members who are critical of our system and want to: 1) Destroy or criticize the system as it currently exists, and/or, 2) Attempt to build new ways (new institutions, ways of living, groups, etc.) that will realize their goals of a better society.

### A. 1. Power?

Group Activists, as a beginning, may want to discuss their ideas concerning power. Is the goal of the group to gain some kind of power (institutional, electoral, popular, media)? What will be the nature of this power? In these questions, the group realizes that just by being a group (rather than individual activists), they have some kind of initial empowerment and in coordinating group actions, a chance to gain more power. Yet I think that some of the reasons we start a group is that we are frustrated and disgusted at who holds the power and how they use their power in our system. In our group efforts, power should be a constant topic of discussion—how we as a group can gain more power, what type of power we want, and how we can resist the kinds of power, the authoritarianism, which we oppose in this system.

### A. 1. a. Fear of Power

Many activist groups oppose any use of “power” and any discussion gaining power is frowned upon. Because we languish under a system of power that relies on economic and political power, because the ways we see power being used in our daily lives involves the exploitation or subjugation of others, as activists we hesitate to seek ANY kind of power. We are wary of replicating in our groups, the forms of power that are operative in our system, where power—becomes an end in itself, not the means to achieve our goals. Yet not all power is inherently exploitative. Power is needed to consolidate a position of opposition to our system and to Fight and destroy the underpinnings of that system.

### A. 1. b. Positive Power

If we truly believe that a revolution is needed in our world, access to power is essential. Without power, we are just another group on the margins fighting to live our lives the way we want, without interference from others in the easiest and most comfortable lifestyle we can manage. Positive power comes from working with others, not as antagonistic individuals but from empowering ourselves in our identities and our personal lives. We struggle together to build a better world, not based upon power gotten at the expense of others, but from our collective power. Granted power will have to be taken (either peacefully over time or violently) from those NOW in power, yet how else are we to change our world? In our groups, in deconstructing traditional forms of power and in realizing a new power that comes from an equal respect and regard for each of our skills, diversities, and contexts, we take the first step to building a new paradigm of power at odds with and away from this world.

### A. 2. Specific Organizational Direction

In formulating our groups, we need to ask ourselves what we want to accomplish, why we are gathering together and how we will pursue our goals. What needs will we fulfill by being a group? What ideas will propel our work together? Food Not Bombs, book stores, sexual abuse survivor groups, street theater, collectives, consciousness raising groups, shelters, reading groups, street gangs, the International Socialist Organization, legal advocacy groups, police brutality watches, guerilla fighters, (help me think of others. . . ) are all groups that work together toward specific actions and practical projects that realize goals resistant to or opposing our current system. Resistance to our system can take many forms and occur on many fronts productive, distributive, ideological, educational resistance can also come from joining or helping the victims/survivors of our society. Each group decides where they are needed most or what work they will undertake.

### A. 3. Assessing the Situation

In group activism, the members must assess the situation of their organization in their discussions of goals and practical actions. Every decision made by the group relies upon an analysis of the context surrounding the formulation of the group and a realistic assessment of the potential goals and actions the group may undertake. Issues of legality illegality, secrecy, size and scope of group projects, estimation of group funding, using the media. revolutionary potential of the working class, coalition building, etc. depend upon an assessment of the group's size, the commitment and time of the members, the external situation and the consequences the group could face because of their actions. To be effective as a group, the situational assessment must be an ongoing process, when new circumstances enter the context and where the group analyzes and critiques their own successes and failures.

### B. Group Organization

Groups decide on basic issues of organization and decision-making, where