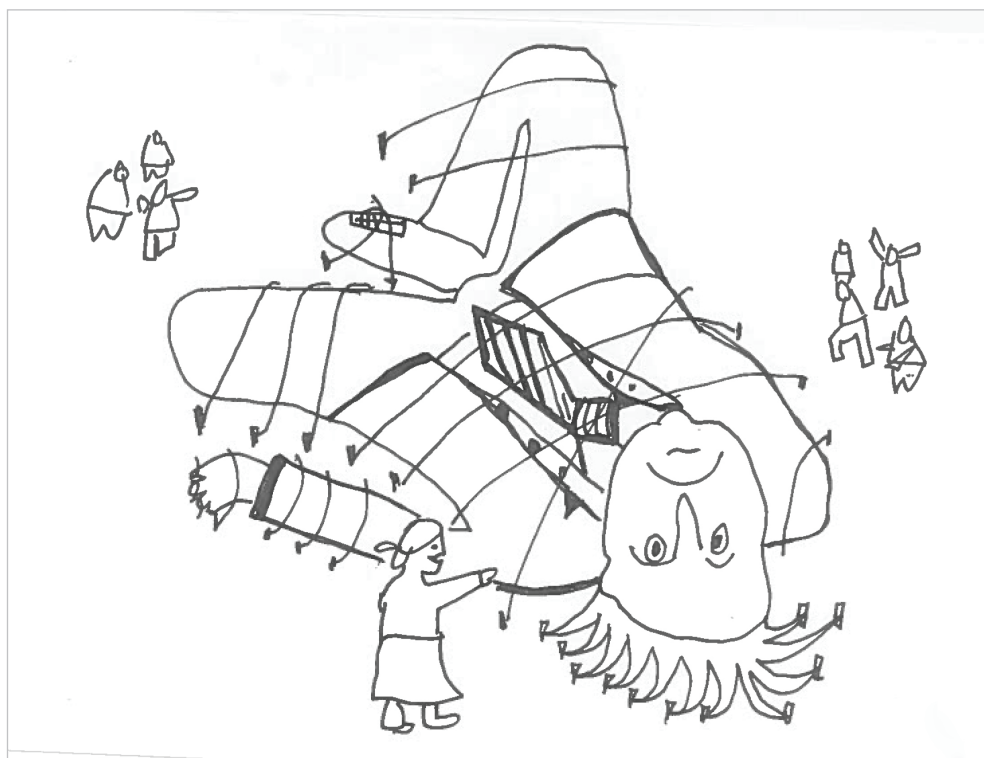


CHAPTER 3

BUILDING POWERFUL COMMUNITY ACTION - *TACTICAL TOOLS*



if ten times the enemy's strength, surround them;
if five times, attack them;
if double, be able to divide them;
if equal, engage them;
if fewer, be able to evade them;
if weaker, be able to avoid them.
—Sun Tzu: The Art of War

In most community struggles, small organisations with limited resources engage with powerful corporations. These corporations are powerful because they have money, technical experts, and powerful lawyers who can use the law to the corporation's advantage. These corporations have control over the media. Often they have government officials on their side.

Despite this power imbalance activist groups can engage powerful corporations through the clever use of their limited resources. Activist groups can build their power and the power of communities through clever tactical action. A tactic is a quick move that enables the activist to deceive their opponent, break through their defenses and move towards achieving their goal.

In the following pages we present ideas and questions to help activists prepare for powerful tactical action, and we present principles activists should keep in mind when creating powerful tactics. Since there are times when the battle may shift from the streets to boardroom negotiations we finally present tactics to consider while in negotiations.

3.1

Preparing for Powerful Tactical Action

The aims of this activity are to help the group:

- Understand who will support or oppose the change the group would like to achieve in the community
- Assess the strength and weakness of supporters or opposers of this change
- Assess the power of supporters and opposers of this change
- Come up with ways of increasing support and decreasing opposition.
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This information will help the activist group develop a plan to increase support for a proposed change, and to think out tactics to engage those who would oppose the change.

To develop powerful tactical ideas an activist needs to have a systematic understanding of

- the problem
- the community
- the activist's organisation
- plan of action

The following questions can help an activist group develop an understanding of the problem, the community, the activists organisation and can help the group develop a plan.

1. THE PROBLEM

1. What is the problem
2. What are the causes of the problem,
3. Who is responsible for the problem?
4. Who is affected by the problem and how?
5. Why is it important to take action on this problem?
6. What changes will resolve this problem?
7. Who has the power to decide on the change?

2. THE COMMUNITY

8. If the problem is complex and cannot be resolved immediately but is important to act on, then what small change can be made and how will this take you in the direction of getting to the big problem.

1. Is the problem recognized as a need by the community?
2. If not then why are you acting on it?
3. How will you inform and make the community aware of the problem and your proposed action?
4. How will you involve the community in your action?
5. How will you keep the community informed during your action?

3. THE ACTIVIST ORGANISATION

1. Will the decision maker you hope to influence talk or negotiate with you? Give reasons why.
2. What power do you have within your organisation and community to influence or pressure the decision maker to talk or negotiate with you ?
3. What power can you use external to your organisation to build up your power?

4. DEVELOPING A PLAN

Good ideas for action only become real with strong plans and implementation. The following questions will help you think about a plan of action.

- a. What actions will you take?
- c. What tasks need to be done to ensure the action is successful?
- d. Who will be responsible for each task?
- b. When will these actions be taken?
- e. When will you meet to monitor your plan and make changes needed?

3.2

Principles for Creating Powerful Tactics



Once an activist group has a clear understanding of the problem, has agreed on the change they want and the actions they will take, the next step is to decide on tactics. The group needs to invent or create clever moves to make their actions powerful. The following principles emerge out of the long history of struggle of poor and working class people. Read these principles and discuss them in your group.

POWER IS CREATED NEVER GIVEN

The power of the community is created. Power is never given. Power is something that is created in clever thinking and action when you face your opponent. Money and training are in themselves not power. Power comes from the clever ways you use the money and training given to your organisation.

THE COMMUNITY IS THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF POWER

If a community agrees on an issue, is clear and united around the change they want, this is a source for powerful action. At the same time, if the community is in disagreement on the problem they are

facing and the change they want, they become divided, this then is a source of serious weakness. Often your action may involve small groups in the community. Find ways of keeping the larger community informed and encourage them to join you.

UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITY CONTEXT IS THE FIRST STEP IN BUILDING POWER

A deep understanding of the problem and the community context enables you to see the root causes and develop ideas for change. A shallow understanding can send you off in the wrong direction and lead to failed action.

A WELL-CRAFTED DEMAND STRENGTHENS SUPPORT

A demand that is framed as being reasonable and realisable will strengthen community support and show up your opponent as unreasonable and unjust. A demand that appears unrealistic and impossible to achieve will allow your opponents to call you unrealistic and irresponsible and could lead to weakening the support of the community.

UNDERSTAND YOUR OPPONENT SO THAT YOU KNOW HOW TO ENGAGE

If you know exactly who your opponent is then you will know how to engage them. If you have a vague and generalised understanding of your opponent, then your engagement will be confused and most likely misdirected. Work out which individuals are responsible, which committee or structure they sit in and what power they have or do not have.

SURPRISE IS A POWERFUL WEAPON OF THE WEAK

Surprise your opponent. Take actions that they were not expecting. Act in a way that does not allow them to calculate your next move. Blocking a road as a form of protest sometimes works well. It comes as a surprise. However, if it is repeated over and over again by the same community, the mine managers and police will know how to disrupt your plans ahead of your action. Community marches is a useful way of telling the authority that you have community support. But if repeated in the same way time and again, they lose the impact on the mind of those in authority.

TIME YOUR ACTION TO BE POWERFUL

Think carefully about the best time to start a campaign, stage a demonstration or engage in street action. Holding a demonstration when government is hosting dignitaries, or a mine is entertaining investors can make a small group action have a powerful effect.

KEEP A FLEXIBLE MIND, CHANGE WHEN THE SITUATION CHANGES

When you take action, the response of the other side can change the situation and disrupt your action. Be alert to changes and be prepared to change your tactic.

USE THE TOOL FOR THE TASK AT HAND

We do not use a hammer to crack an egg or a bread knife to saw wood. Think carefully whether the action you take is suited to the objective you want to achieve.

WIN THE PUBLIC SUPPORT

Both corporations and government officials are concerned about maintaining a good public image. Community activists also needs public respect. Put your story out in the media and win the sympathy of the public. Take care how you act in the eyes of the public and what you say. Irresponsible public statements can give your opponent an opportunity to discredit you.

KEEP YOUR ALLIES INFORMED, BUILD YOUR SOLIDARITY NETWORK

Keep our supporters in other organisations informed at all times on the progress of your campaign. You will need their support when your actions get more complicated or when the authorities use repressive action against you, such as detaining demonstrators.

DESTRUCTIVE ACTION DESTROYS POWER

Burning down schools and community facilities, violent action on individuals, may express your anger and get you TV and Newspaper headlines on the day, but these are sure ways to weaken your campaign and destroy your power in the long run.

3.3

Negotiations



GUIDELINES FOR NEGOTIATIONS: WHEN THE BATTLE MOVES FROM THE STREET TO THE BOARDROOM

When your action is strong enough and successful enough, the opponent will agree to talk. This does not mean that you have won your demands. It means that the fight shifts from the “street” to the “boardroom table”.

Many communities lose their hard fought struggle at the point of negotiations. Government officials and corporations are stronger in the boardroom than when they are engaging communities on the street. Here are some guidelines to help you build your power when you agree to enter negotiations.

BEFORE THE NEGOTIATIONS

Be clear about what the other side has agreed to talk about. Often the purpose of the meeting is kept vague, so that the other side does not commit itself.

GET A MANDATE

Inform the community what the meeting is about and ask them what you should talk about and what you should agree on. This is a mandate. As a democratic organisation you are obliged to stick to the mandate you are given during negotiations. Should the situation change you would need to get a fresh mandate.

REPORT BACK

Inform the community when you will report back to them the outcome of the meeting. Take care to report back soonest after the meeting. Not reporting back or delaying to report back weakens community interest and unity.

PREPARE AS A TEAM

- Ensure that everybody in your negotiating team is clear about the demands and the mandate you will be negotiating on.
- Agree in your team what parts of your demand is negotiable and what is non-negotiable.
- Agree in your team who would be the main spokesperson
- Agree on the point that should there be disagreement in your team in the course of the meeting, you will adjourn the meeting and have a private team meeting (a caucus) where you will settle any differences.
- Appoint a member of your team to take detailed notes of the meeting

MEETING AGENDA

Study the meeting agenda carefully before the meeting and make sure it covers all the issues you want discussed.

MEETING VENUE

Agree on the venue of the meeting. Companies may want to meet far from the community, at an expensive hotel. This is a tactic to separate you, and to put you at a disadvantage as you will not be on your home ground. Choose a venue that you are comfortable with. The best meeting place is where the community can observe the negotiations or get report backs soon after.

IN THE NEGOTIATIONS

In negotiations opposing groups use a range of tactics to gain an advantage over the other. Here are common tactics to look out for:

Vague responses to the demands

Often the company or government officials will give you a vague response to your demand. For example, they may say “we agree in principle but we will look into it.”

Dragging out the discussions

The company may drag out discussions, or adjourn talks for a few weeks in the belief that this will cool the community down and get them to lose focus.

Junior Officials

Often both corporations and government send junior officials to negotiations who have no authority to make decisions. This means that they do not take the meeting seriously and/or do not intend to arrive at an agreement.

The Minutes

The minutes are an important document, especially useful when there is a dispute. Whoever writes the minutes has the power to change the meaning of what was discussed or agreed on. Usually the company makes sure they are in control of the minutes.

Arriving at settlement

Often the agreement you arrive at in negotiations does not include everything you demanded. You may be forced to settle for less. Or you may be forced to change some of your original demands in order to arrive at a settlement. A key principle is that an agreement is made only after you have discussed the proposal with the community and got their agreement.

AFTER THE NEGOTIATIONS

- Meet as a team as soon as possible after the negotiations and review what was discussed and agreed on.
- Write a report or notes on what happened at the meeting
- Report back to the community. This is a compulsory step as the community must be kept informed at all times.
- Inform your supporters and allies on the outcome of the negotiations.