

How to Plan an Action

October, 2002

You're upset about the drive toward war in Iraq. You've called and written your representatives, you're tired of just grumbling at the TV. You want to do more, but you don't know what or how. Maybe you don't think of yourself as an organizer. But if you've ever thrown a party, run a meeting, or gathered a group of friends together to go to a show or a sporting event, you have the skills you need to organize a small but effective action.

Just answer the following questions:

Who, what, when, where, how and why?

WHO: Maybe you and a few friends who feel the same way you do. An affinity group is five to fifteen people who want to take political action together, and who share something in common: a liking for each other, a common neighborhood or school, a shared religion.

WHAT: Have a meeting. Make it a potluck. Have big sheets of paper and markers there.

Brainstorm—**WHY** are we against the war? A brainstorm is a short process in which everyone throws out ideas, without discussion or criticism. List the reasons on paper. There are strong moral, ethical, economic, and strategic reasons to oppose this war. Which are most important to you?

WHO can we best reach? Remember the secret of successful organizing is that you don't have to convince your die-hard opponents. You simply have to convince those who are undecided to support your position, encourage those who already support your position to become active, and empower those who are active to become organizers of others. Which groups are we best able to communicate with? **WHERE** can they be reached, and with **WHAT** message?

WHAT kind of actions are we willing to take? Political action can have different primary purposes. Below are some examples.

- Educational: Speaking to groups or organizing forums, leafletting, writing letters to editors or op-ed columns, tables at shopping malls or public events, teach-ins, etc.
- Making Opposition Visible: rallies, street theater, banner hangs, vigils, marches, symbolic actions, etc.
- Influencing our elected representatives: Writing, calling, emailing, petitions, lobbying, etc.
- Actively withdrawing our consent and compliance: refusal to cooperate with the

war effort, soldiers refusing to fight, boycotts, strikes, etc.

- Nonviolent disruption of war efforts: disruption of hearings or debates; civil disobedience at Federal Buildings, congressional offices, oil companies, defence contractors, etc.

WHAT is our message? **WHAT** symbols, images, slogans, colors, sound bites express our message?

WHERE can it best be expressed, and **WHEN**? Is there a location at which we can directly confront some aspect of the war effort? Or where we can reach crowds of people? When will offices be open? When will people be around?

HOW will we carry out this action?

- Scout your location first. Be sure you know what the physical layout and constraints are. Where are your exit routes? Where is the best place to be visible? What are the hazards?
- Plan your action. Like theater, a powerful action has an entrance and exit strategy, and a climactic moment in between. What will that be? How will you know when it's over?
- Arrange support. Most forms of action are safe and legal, but if you are planning civil disobedience or disruption, see the Support section below and prepare for the possibility of arrest.
- Choose roles and responsibilities. Who will make or acquire the necessary banners, costumes, or props? Bring them? How will you all get there? Meet? Get home? Regroup if you get scattered.
- Inform the media. Send out a press release covering those classic questions, Who, What, When, Where, How and Why. Include a contact phone number. Have a support person make followup calls.

Do it! Afterwards, evaluate. Have another potluck. Plan the next one.

What might this look like? Here are some real examples of effective, small actions around the war or related issues.

A mother and her three children go out to a freeway overpass after 9-11 and hold a banner reading, "Justice, Not Vengeance!" They spend a couple of hours talking to passersby.

A group of women dressed in pink strip down to dove-covered bras and panties on the Capitol steps to greet Congressional Representatives with antiwar radical cheerleading.

An affinity groups sits in at the office of their congressional representative.

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