

Direct Action

Affinity Groups

An affinity group is the fundamental unit of direct action. It is a self-sufficient support system which may develop actions on its own, or may work with other affinity groups toward a common goal in a large action. The most effective groups consist of 5-15 people, and they usually strengthen over time. They differ from other groups of friends in that participants tend to have more in common, there is an absence of hierarchy, and over time, a deep trust in the group's intelligence can develop, allowing us to let go of some of our own prejudices and consider what is best for the group.

Every affinity group must decide for itself how it will make decisions and what it wants to do. This process starts when an affinity group forms. If a new person wants to join an affinity group, she should find out what

the group believes in and what they plan to do, and decide if they are compatible. Ideally, you will have a shared idea of your individual and collective goals for the action or campaign, what support you will need from others, and what you can offer each other. It helps if you have agreement on certain basic things: how active, spiritual, nonviolent, touchy-feely, militant, or willing to risk arrest you'll be – however, it may be that you just work together at a job, play music or hike together, and that's okay too. The point is that doing things together is safer, and much more fun, than doing them alone.

The concept has a long history. It developed in Catalonia and was used in the 1930s during the Spanish Civil War, when anarchists, communists, and other libertarians fought desperately against Franco and

the fascists. In 1969, affinity groups organized a massive nonviolent blockade during the 30,000 strong occupation of the Ruhr nuclear power station in Germany. In 1971 in the US occupations of the Seabrook nuclear power station, when 10,000 were arrested, affinity groups were key, as they were throughout the highly successful anti-nuclear movement. More recently, they were used with outstanding success in the mass actions in Seattle, Prague, and Québec City, where the open manner of organizing created a framework within which affinity groups could plan autonomous actions.

Affinity groups form the basic decision-making bodies of many mass actions; they also frequently work together as study groups, or provide services to their community. Within the group, there is a whole range of roles that its members can perform, which could include: a media liaison, a facilitator for meetings, a note taker, someone

trained in first aid, a legal observer. As well as fulfilling these roles, the affinity group can take on a specialized role in the way it interacts with other groups, or operates within the action or community. There can be affinity groups specializing in copwatching, communications, health care, street theatre, or blockading. With a focus, each affinity group can do its job and support the work of others. In this way, many affinity groups form a network that achieves exponentially more than equal numbers of unaffiliated activists ever could.

The thing to remember is that an affinity group belongs to you – you can decide what actions and what degree of risk you wish to take. Bringing creative people together to work and play collectively is one of our most powerful acts of resistance.

Resources:

» **Temporary Anticapitalist Teams:** www.temporarily.org.uk



Bette Lee

Radical cheerleading unleashes silliness for the crowd. Portland, Oregon, US