
CHAPTER SIX

CONFLICT AND CONVERGENCE BETWEEN THE THREE FRAMES

1. INTRODUCTION

Both social movements and ideologies are often analysed in isolation from each other. I argued in chapter one that orientational frames, like Freeden's ideologies, should be understood as overlapping in content and in chapter two that the current cycle of contention should be understood as a coming together of distinct social movement processes. Having separated the orientational frames for the purpose of identification and individual analysis it is now possible to examine some points of convergence and divergence, as they emerge in the movement context. Encounters between actors utilising various aspects of each of the frames are certainly not unique to contemporary movements. Because each has overlapping historical continuities the following examines issues which some activists would consider age-old debates. In the most part these issues relate to the different understandings of methods for social change since it is primarily 'on the streets' where such encounters take place. However, since those methods are reflections of deeper structures of political beliefs and values, tactical debates highlight areas of tension and agreement across each frame taken as a whole.

The chapters in Part III examine two very specific strips of movement activity, where the frames become a useful way of understanding the interrelations of different sections of the movements. For this chapter, I retain the structure of dealing with each frame individually, except now focusing on their place in movement interactions. Since frame interactions are so often found in action-focused contexts, it is action-focused frame elements that I will highlight in order to explore the understanding of each frame, taken from the perspective of the others. Doing so highlights a number of important threads that run through the relationships between frames. These relate to tactics for social change, understandings and practices of democracy, and understandings of 'the movement' itself. These threads are brought together in the conclusion to the chapter.

2. THE UNITED FRONT AND ITS DISCONTENTS

By tracing the development of British Trotskyism and investigating its current instantiation in the RS frame I have described the critique of capitalism and the planned alternative that is utilised by a significant current within the recent waves of contention. I have, thus far, only briefly touched on the specific tactics used within the movement of movements. As we will see, the latter is key to defining the interaction of the different activist frames found therein. In chapter three I described the difficulties that Trotskyist activists had in finding genuine common ground with activists in the emerging new social movements. Some solutions, with respect to identity-based movements have been found within the RS frame; however, present movements have thrown up a new range of difficulties.

Rituals and Tactics

There are a number of tactics that most revolutionary vanguard organisations engage in, which have been consistently used in Britain since the 1930s. Educational work in the form of meetings open to those outside of the main organisations, discussing current or historical events and offering the revolutionary socialist response are common. Weekly paper sales, and public stalls promoting organisations are another staple tactic, and may be located in busy urban centres or near significant workplaces. The frequency of such activities tends to increase as the activity of other movements increase. Members are also expected to take part in any trade union that is attached to their profession and stand for elections as shop stewards.⁵²⁷ Trotskyist organisations attempt to influence the political direction of the trade unions through caucusing wherever there are two or more members involved in the union. All of these activities serve dual purposes: creating dialogue with politically active populations who may have different political standpoints, and seeking to build the vanguard.

Activity on demonstrations also has the same dual foci, explicitly using the tactics of paper sales and stalls to fulfil their goals.⁵²⁸ However, there are clearly additional tactics. Organisations commonly attempt to lead marches, using very long (road width) banners held at the front as a physical and symbolic barrier stopping others marching ahead. At the anti-war march held on the final day of ESF I the large number of

⁵²⁷ These expectations are, for instance, written into the constitution of the SWP; SWP, 2004, “Constitution” in *Post-Conference Bulletin, December 2004*.

⁵²⁸ This was made abundantly clear at, for example, the caucuses of the IST during ESF I where a sales-related ‘pep talk’ was followed by instructions on organising the maximum coverage of space and time at the events; field notes, caucuses of International Socialist Tendency, Florence, October 2002.

revolutionary socialist organisations attempting to lead the march led to the farcical situation of many hundred of marchers at the starting point for several hours, jostling for position with one group eventually deciding to start the march over an hour ahead of schedule in order to keep their ‘pole position’.⁵²⁹ Certain forms of uniformity are very evident on demonstrations, with large colourful flags an obvious symbol. These may be interpreted variously as solidarity building among the grassroots members; as tradition; or as self-consciously displaying strength of numbers to the wider movements. The megaphone-led chants are another solidarity raising, communicative habit. Finally, a march tactic new to this researcher appeared in Florence, at ESF I and subsequently became far more common on UK demonstrations. A number of marchers repeatedly sat down, waiting for several minutes in order that some free space became available on the road ahead. On a signal participants would ‘charge’ forward. The mass produced, widely distributed placards are also significant. Their value for widely advertising the organisation who produced them is lost on neither the organisations themselves, who display the names of their papers prominently across the top (a tactic copied by the *Daily Mirror* at the F15 anti-war march) nor those who take the banners, some of whom can be seen tearing the ‘advertising’ from the placard or rewriting the slogans.⁵³⁰

These behaviours clearly attempt to demonstrate the strength of the organisation. They also often give a military feel to the procession of particular Trotskyist organisations within mass marches. As such, they may be interpreted to connect with the belief in the necessity of a militia in the organisation of the revolution, a ‘playing’ of roles that may take much more significance at some point in the future. The fact that these are ‘playing’ (i.e. purely symbolic) tactics also demonstrates the distance from the present with which the revolutionary situation is perceived.⁵³¹ Such behaviour should logically be rejected within either of the other frames identified here. The ‘massed ranks’ approach is never used within the DA frame wherein small, flexible groups are always preferred. Uniform can be perceived among the black bloc tendencies on the marches but this, as I will describe below, is a rather wayward variant of the DA frame. The RL frame baulks at the straight-forward creation of divisions implied by uniformity. As described below, there is also a distrust of the over-simplification of

⁵²⁹ Field notes, anti-war march, Florence, October 2002.

⁵³⁰ Field notes, anti-war march, London, February 2003.

⁵³¹ This interpretation is clearly less direct, because it is less cognitive, than the majority of the analysis presented here. However, to the extent that it is defensible it serves to show that frame elements may be attached to particular behaviours; a non-trivial point. That more serious behaviours are based on the militia belief is indicated in chapter three.

complex critiques and alternatives when they appear in the guise of a mass demonstration.

Two aspects to the rituals described above are noteworthy: the presentation of militancy and party building. Both are consequent on the involvement of Trotskyist organisations in broader mass movements. Combining the perceived ‘truth’ of Marxism and the need to spread that truth to people as yet unconscious of their class interests leads to the belief that the vanguard organisation must take part in any movement that may yield potential recruits. The current cycle of contention may be interpreted within the RS frame as ‘objectively anti-capitalist’, as discussed in chapter two. The failure of many participants to grasp the revolutionary truth is understood as in need of correction: “its not like class has disappeared, because it hasn’t. So you’ve got radicalism ... going in the wrong direction ... you’ve got the labour movement over here, the young radicals over there, and what you’ve got to do somehow is pull them together.”⁵³² Vanguard participation in broader movements is strongly instrumental. The following quotation comes from a tactical critique by the SWP on the activities of the International Socialist Organisation (ISO, which is the American national-level affiliate of the IST). ISO had taken part in Ralph Nader’s independent candidacy for president in the 2001 elections. Callinicos supported the involvement but criticised the fact that “Every ISO branch or district was instructed to hold a public meeting on ‘The Revolutionary Ideas of Karl Marx’” aimed at non-revolutionaries in the Nader campaign.

“The ISO’s approach showed little sense of the dynamic of a growing and radicalizing movement whose members are bound together by their common activity. In such a movement, revolutionaries establish themselves in the first instance through their effectiveness in this activity. Political discussion, of course, is important, but it is most likely to emerge organically from the work of the movement rather than originating from abstract topics artificially introduced by the revolutionaries.”⁵³³

Two alternatives for action are present: ISO’s method of bringing people out of the campaign into a discursive context intended to stimulate radicalism or the establishment of respect within the campaign in order to carry political points later. Presently, the implication is more important than the tactical debate: the debate only makes sense if both parties accept that the revolutionaries have a superior

⁵³² ‘Kara’, interview, December 2004.

⁵³³ Callinicos, A., 2001, *The Anti-Capitalist Movement and the Revolutionary Left*, C3, a strategic document for the SWP, available at: http://www.swp.org.uk/swp_archive_list.php?issue_id=176; last accessed, 03/07/05.

understanding of capitalism, and that the purpose of participating in this reformist campaign is to convert others to that worldview.

The most active examples of this instrumental approach to the broader movements are found in the united fronts created by vanguard parties with the stated aim of getting a coalition of groups together to work on a particular issue. Among other issues these have been focused on parliamentary elections (Socialist Unity, Socialist Alliance, Respect), the anti-globalisation movement (Globalise Resistance) and racism (Anti-Nazi League, Unite Against Fascism). The SWP describes the united front as “enormously flexible” and,

“the most advantageous relationship between an organised revolutionary minority and the rest of the movement... a revolutionary party must both seek to provide a strategy for the movement (which is not the same as its total politics) and to grow by attracting to it the most able fighters in the class.”⁵³⁴

This is not to say that activists involved in united front activities are not committed to the aims of the movement as a whole; the energy and time required to carry out one’s party duties and duties within a front organisation are demanding and not taken lightly. Rather, this point defines the area of tension for the specification of democracy within the RS frame. Democracy is based on the combination of the importance of the class (and ultimately the society) over the individual and a belief in equality: no one individual can be superior to another. However, the very essence of the vanguard party is based on the ascription of ‘false consciousness’ to non-partisans, and therefore the belief that partisans have a superior understanding of diagnoses and prescriptions than any other point of view. Furthermore, to the degree that adherents believe in the scientific truth of Marxism, they are simply unwilling to countenance any different analyses, consigning the latter to the realm of ‘reformism’. The united front is a space in which political debates across ideological barriers are possible, and in an action-oriented context that requires decision making. Here, fundamental conflicts between participants are likely to come to the surface.

The method of consensus-based decision making (CBDM), detailed in chapter four, provides a key example. CBDM has dedicated proponents, including Seeds for Change, who offer professional training for campaigners, co-operatives and community organisations that includes decision making methods. The participation of that group in the launch of the Sheffield Social Forum (SSF, see chapter eight) was secured, and their workshop was attended by several members of the Trotskyist organisation Workers’ Power. The debate followed well-worn lines about the practical application of

⁵³⁴ SWP, 2004, *Post-Conference Bulletin, December 2004*.

CBDM given time limits on political decisions. What was surprising in this instance, however, was the vehemence with which the Trotskyist organizer pursued his critique. CBDM had been justified as a way of making more creative decisions that could keep a group together because no-one would feel like their opinion was discounted. It was also justified in opposition to majority voting with specific reference to electoral democracy, but with no explicit critique of the campaign groups that held on to a representative committee structure governed by the norm of majority voting. The WP activist's reaction is a little surprising. After all, CBDM explicitly strengthens minorities, and as WP members have often expressed, they know full well that they are in a minority in coalition meetings. They criticize the SWP tactics of bloc voting and caucusing in united fronts. After some time the reason for the depth of his feeling became a little more evident, through his use of the phrase the 'tyranny of structurelessness'. For a generation of activists, this is a well-known reference to an article by feminist writer Jo Freeman, which has gained classic status since publication in the 1970s in a wide range of newsletters, magazines, journals.⁵³⁵ The article argued against a prevailing trend in the women's movement for forming 'structureless' groups, a trend repeated in the 'anti-globalization' activities of 'dis-organisations'. Freeman argued that structurelessness was practically impossible for any group that oriented itself to activities other than inward focused consciousness raising (i.e. self-help). This was primarily because it obscures genuine relationships of power. Structurelessness creates elitism because of the uneven nature of communication within informal structures. Bonded by friendship ties, some members would inevitably communicate more frequently and, without necessarily conspiring to do so, would govern the overall direction of a group. Additionally, group leaders necessarily emerged, especially in the media. Despite those individuals insisting that they were not speaking for anyone else, they were nevertheless heard as the voice of the movement. Because of the commitment to structurelessness the group could not choose who that individual would be, nor have any say in what voice they would present. The simple utterance of the phrase 'tyranny of structurelessness' can bring these arguments to mind for many activists. Even those who have not read the articles are aware of the general impression of informal structures of power emerging in the context of self-conscious structurelessness. What the WP organizer had done was logically questionable: he elided debate on a technique for decision making into an ideological argument that takes the form of hierarchy versus structurelessness. At the same time, it makes sense within the conception of frames I have developed here. CBDM is intimately connected with the DA frame, which

⁵³⁵ Freeman, J., 1972, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" in *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 17, pp. 151-165.

also contains strong critique of hierarchical organising. Nevertheless, the critique of voting is not the same as the critique of hierarchy; this is an example of connections by association rather than by logic.⁵³⁶ It almost goes without saying that the degree of common ground that the proponent of CBDM and the WP member found on this issue was nil.⁵³⁷

The View from Outside

From a range of political perspectives the actions associated with the RS frame in general and the SWP in particular have been heavily criticised. This can reach paranoia: “Everything you think about the SWP, anything you suspect them of - well, its always worse than that.”⁵³⁸ In order to understand why, I will begin by describing a situation that arose out of large, multi-lingual planning meetings for ESF III, held in the Greater London Authority’s (GLA) City Hall. ‘Oli’ brought several large braids of garlic and offered the heads to participants to “ward off the influence of the undead of the far left”. He explained, “they always come to where the excitement is in politics, they’re attracted to it, but they try to control it, direct it in a certain way. They suck the creativity out of it, suck it dry until there’s nothing left”.⁵³⁹ His was the most surreal approach to making this point, but the attitude of a vocal minority was of opposition to the alliance between the revolutionary left, the trade unions and the GLA.⁵⁴⁰ Another participant made a large sign with ‘SWP’ written on it, which she would raise whenever she positively identified speakers from the platform or from the floor as members of the SWP.⁵⁴¹ This was partly a response to the official ban on political parties that had led to SWP members ‘disguising’ themselves through claiming other allegiances. These tended to be obvious SWP fronts such as Globalise Resistance and Unite Against Fascism.⁵⁴² In their written critiques, the ‘horizontal’ section of the ESF organisers aimed precisely at the lack of transparency and democracy in the centre of the organisation. By so doing, they target the tensions between the claim to superiority and the valuing of democracy raised above. Seen from outside of the RS frame, the commitment to democracy and the notion of the self-emancipation of the working class is purely rhetoric. This conflict

⁵³⁶ The precise connections, which are around the relationship between the individual and the group, were explored in chapter four.

⁵³⁷ Field notes, Sheffield Social Forum launch event, March 2004.

⁵³⁸ ‘Darell’, field notes, informal discussion, Sheffield, February 2004.

⁵³⁹ ‘Oli’, field notes, European Preparatory Assembly for ESF III, London, January 2004.

⁵⁴⁰ The full context of this debate emerges in chapter eight.

⁵⁴¹ Field notes, European Preparatory Meeting for ESF III, London, January 2004.

⁵⁴² In the case of Alex Callinicos, his obvious lack of activist involvement in other well-known organisations led to his affiliation being listed as the (almost certainly fictional) ‘Project K’.

can be greatly exacerbated by the practice of 'packing meetings', whereby the SWP organise a large number of comrades to attend meetings where strategically important decisions are to be made, that they otherwise would not have attended.⁵⁴³ This is a difficult tactic to square with party-building because it (seemingly inevitably) reduces others' willingness to participate. Several ex-members I have spoken to identified the practice as one that contributed to their decision to leave.⁵⁴⁴ However, it fits squarely with the concept of the united front identified above.

Several other points bear some development. The implication of the 'undead' labelling of both trade unionists and revolutionary socialists is an indication that the Marxist ideology is seen as out of date.⁵⁴⁵ While this sometimes appears as an instinctive reaction, at times detractors offer a more considered rejection. First, people commonly, from a range of political perspectives, will deny the utility of the class distinction in the modern economy. While some Trotskyist groups have consciously tried to demonstrate the inclusiveness of their definition of the working class (to include youth, students and unemployed⁵⁴⁶) the historical focus on the industrial working class, particularly during periods of high workers militancy in the 1970s and 1980s, has undoubtedly fed the popular conception of working class as located in heavy industry. Second, people will deny the desirability of revolution: the violence of the revolutionary situation is not seen as justified given the result of putting another political elite into a position of authority which they may exploit for their own ends. The anarchistic distrust of power found in a number of currents in the recent movements absolutely cannot accept the notion of the vanguard taking centralised control, even for a temporary period. Third, people will deny the viability of revolution, because of the military and economic strength of the state and corporations, or because of the perceived apathy of the majority, bred by a high standard of living. Fourth, people regularly identify the notion of party building as a key motivation for Trotskyist involvement in broad based campaigns and movements. The visibility of paper sellers, and their tendency to attempt to sell membership of their organisations, reinforces the idea that there is a mismatch in motivations. If Trotskyist involvement is seen as party building, and the party line is seen as revolutionary, then other participants who value

⁵⁴³ One anti-war activist noted an occasion when he had spotted a lone SWP organiser in a small Sheffield Against War meeting sending text messages. Within fifteen minutes, and shortly before a vote, several party members 'burst through the door'; 'Orson', interview, December 2004.

⁵⁴⁴ 'Joe', interview, January 2005; 'Daniel', interview, August 2004.

⁵⁴⁵ The understanding of a battle between the new and the old within the general movements comes to the fore in chapter eight.

⁵⁴⁶ Revolution, 2002, *What We Stand For. Manifesto Produced by Revolution National Committee.*

the particular events for themselves will see Trotskyist involvement as cynical, which tends to produce a rejection of the RS frame as a whole. In all of these aspects there is significant difference between proponents of the RS frame and other currents running through the recent waves of contention.

3. APPROPRIATIONS AND 'MISAPPLICATIONS' OF DIRECT ACTION

Direct action, understood as unmediated, confrontational and prefigurative has been filled out with a number of political principles which allow activists to make sense of their action and feeds their critiques of the present society. Briefly these include: individual freedom and responsibility; the primacy of action over doctrine; the acceptance of the validity of alternative understandings; the need to reclaim power from the state-corporate nexus; the value of decentralised, non-hierarchical structures and a vision of direct consensual democracy. Connected with spectacular and creative action within a broad ranging movement there is obviously some potential for those working within other political traditions to be tempted to direct action as a tactic. I will briefly offer some indications of the limits on the contagion of tactical ideas when used in isolation from the surrounding DA frame. Within the general movements there are also tensions created by the confrontational attitude of direct action, the potential for insularity of affinity groups and collectives, and the difficulties of representation created by their particular forms of organising. These will also be explored.

Contagious Direct Action?

Within the RS frame, definitions of success in terms of convincing the broader movement of their case can rest on recruitment to particular organisations. Within the DA frame, however, propaganda replaces recruitment. Propaganda is produced by individuals or small groups rather than large centralised organisations. At events where many groups are doing direct actions some may produce literature and others may help to distribute it. However, such agreements are usually contingent on the content of the literature and there is certainly no pressure applied to people to spread others' words. Largely, however, to the degree that activists utilising the DA frame consider that others should adopt their approach, they lead by example. There are two indications that practices at least have spread out from those who subscribe to the anti-authoritarian focus of much of the DA frame.

In the first case, the revolutionary socialist youth organisation Revolution (closely related to Workers' Power) have taken up the concept of 'affinity groups' with enthusiasm. Youth training camps have taken place across Europe with practical

training in methods of confrontation. These have included ‘chaining’ and ‘de-arrest’. The former is a particular way of linking arms in dynamic ranks in order to push against police lines. The latter is simply a case of hounding police if they are attempting to arrest a comrade, and physically blocking with enough bodies that the police are unable to complete the arrest. However, while the training may be nominally for ‘direct action’, and affinity groups formed in a decentralised manner, they retain a strongly socialist colouring. Rather, this must be understood merely as the borrowing of a particular action repertoire that fits in neatly with a focus on the need for workers’ militia within the RS frame.

The second case of diffusion of direct action ideas is the claimed intention by Mark Curtis, as he joined World Development Movement as its new director, to lead the organisation to utilise more direct action. As described in chapter five, the organisation is more closely associated with the dissemination of independent political and economic research that is strongly critical of the signing of various free trade treaties and the powers of the World Trade Organisation. However, Curtis attempted something of a shift in the organisation when he claimed, “We've seen the limits of traditional campaigning. It is the failure of the development lobby. We're now considering peaceful direct action.”⁵⁴⁷ A local member noted that,

“[Curtis said] we need to, say, be going into supermarkets and putting stickers on their products with campaigning slogans on them... [but] every year, we negotiate with supermarkets and get permission, and get them to support us promoting fair trade in their stores, and so the initial response was oh yeah, we go around Tesco's stores for eleven months of the year putting campaign stickers on, without even asking, and then the twelfth month we ask if we can do a stall on fair-trade... I do think that people need to know that there is a gradation of levels of action and everyone should be given two or three chances to get on board first.”⁵⁴⁸

This quotation makes it abundantly clear that, at least at local membership level, direct action was unlikely to take place within WDM. The notion that ‘everyone should be given a chance to get on board’ is opposed to the planning of confrontational direct action which attempts to force people’s behaviour in particular ways.

The View from Outside

Often, within the social movement literature, direct action groups are understood as a ‘radical wing’ of a broader movement. Scholars have noted a ‘radical flank effect’: the presence of radicals increases the chance of success for more moderate groups

⁵⁴⁷ Quote from Tempest, M., 2004, “Louder than Words” in *The Guardian*, 5th August 2004.

⁵⁴⁸ ‘Kenneth’, interview, January 2005.

engaging with institutional political processes.⁵⁴⁹ While this picture undoubtedly has some merit within quite specific movements,⁵⁵⁰ it does not appear to be the case within the broader cycle of contention. Rather, proponents of the DA frame are ‘doing their own thing’ and often see their aims as notably different from those of activists within recognisably different currents. For their own part, activists in other sections of the movement have, at times, consciously distanced themselves from direct actions. This is most obviously the case with the ‘black blocs’ that have appeared at all the large mobilisations against international financial institutions.

The black blocs are a particular form of direct action that appear to be quite distinct from the tactics engaged in by local proponents of the DA frame I have identified here. For instance, a widely distributed communiqué from a black bloc at the Seattle protests claimed,

“We contend that property destruction is not a violent activity unless it destroys lives or causes pain in the process ... When we smash a window, we aim to destroy the thin veneer of legitimacy that surrounds private property rights. At the same time, we exorcise that set of violent and destructive social relationships which has been imbued in almost everything around us. By ‘destroying’ private property, we convert its limited exchange value into an expanded use value. A storefront window becomes a vent to let some fresh air into the oppressive atmosphere of a retail outlet.”⁵⁵¹

While those working within the DA frame may well agree with this conception of violence, the symbolism of the actions described here do not fit easily with the hope for a direct impact. To be sure, ‘economic damage’ applied to a synecdoche, an action form we’ve seen frequently, may also be applied here. But of course, the cost of a broken window to Nike or McDonalds is negligible. More importantly, this is not an argument used by the ACME Collective.

There are further cases where more radical or confrontational actions might sit uneasily within the DA frame, which also cause tensions with the wider movements. The power of Critical Mass to cause disruption makes it an attractive tactic to highlight other issues. As reported above, critical mass was used extensively during protests

⁵⁴⁹ Gamson, W.A. & Meyer, D.S., 1996, “Framing Political Opportunity” in McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, pp.288-9; Johnson, R., 2000, “Advocates and Activists: Conflicting Approaches on Nonproliferation and the Test Ban Treaty” in Florini, ed., *The Third Force. The Rise of Transnational Civil Society*, (Japan Centre for International Exchange, Tokyo), pp. 49-81.

⁵⁵⁰ Indeed, there is evidence that at least some of those involved in the anti-roads protest camps, where there was a clear alliance with those working through legal channels, perceived their own behaviour in this way; Wall, D., 1999, *Earth First! and the Anti-Roads Movement. Radical Environmentalism and Comparative Social Movements*, (Routledge, London), pp. 155-6.

⁵⁵¹ ACME Collective, 1999, *N30 Black Bloc Communiqué*. Available at: http://www.geocities.com/kk_abacus/ACME.html; last accessed 05/05/03.

against the second Gulf war. Despite the economic disruption argument, it loses its obvious directness when used to portray a message clearly directed to the international sphere rather than the local. Both critical masses and spontaneous blockades caused widespread traffic disruption. The scale and commitment required for a genuine attempt to ‘Stop the City’ was never available. The aims of the actions were, therefore, reduced to an attempt win over bystanders.⁵⁵² Given the inherently emotional issue and the preceding level of public debate and protest, opinions were already highly polarised; continuing disruption led to increasingly hostile bystander responses. Some previously avid supporters of critical mass as direct action were led to accept that in this case the tactic was misplaced. Indeed, this kind of ‘tactical stretching’ is explicitly criticised in the movement produced book *Critical Mass*.⁵⁵³

The tensions that result from these ‘misapplications’ of direct action lead activists from other sections of the movement to believe that direct activists are simply intent on causing trouble.⁵⁵⁴ They are criticised because they are not sufficiently in control of their anger, nor considerate of the consequences in terms of the message put out to bystanders. Such criticisms hint at a deeper disagreement. Because direct action is not intended to be primarily symbolic, activists engaged in it do not fear upsetting onlookers. The classic argument with respect to anti-war critical masses was that “that kind of direct action just pisses people off, and they’re exactly the sort of people we shouldn’t be pissing off - just ordinary people going to work.”⁵⁵⁵ ‘Orson’ was looking to further build a mass movement, on the basis that the more people involved the greater the chance of success. For those engaged in direct action, however, they did not see their task as primarily converting people to the cause. Potential converts also had a moral responsibility to take action but had already chosen not to. Non-participation created a divide that, at least during the moment of action, need not be bridged.

A continuing political tension exists between proponents of DA and traditional Trotskyist activists over which agents hold the power to fundamentally challenge the status quo. The socialist frame, as described earlier, holds the position that revolution is the goal, and mass working class action is the means. For DA activists, alternatively,

⁵⁵² It also be noted that the emotionality of protest also came to the fore here. Particularly on ‘Day-X’ (see chapter 7) many demonstrations were clearly an expression of anger confronting the start of hostilities in Iraq, not a reasoned tactical move with particular aims.

⁵⁵³ Carlsson, C., 2002, “Cycling Under the Radar - Assertive Desertion.” in Carlsson, ed. *Critical Mass. Bicycling’s Defiant Celebration*, (AK Press, Edinburgh), pp. 75-82.

⁵⁵⁴ I use inverted commas because, of course, they are only misapplications from a particular point of view, here I imply the broadest understanding of the DA frame. However, it is not the purpose of this thesis to label any one interpretation more correct than any other.

⁵⁵⁵ ‘Orson’, interview, December 2004.

any particular action may be held of value in challenging the status quo, for a complex of goals are present. Even those activists focused on revolution consider that this may be achieved through the autonomous actions of disparate groups with disparate identities and grievances. For instance, in arguing over the value of a particular direct action in the anti-war movement one activist referred back to the 1968 uprisings across France as being sparked by one university occupation by four students. The standard argument against this emanating from the socialist frame is that such actions are 'elitist'. For DA activists, agency lies firmly with the individual, and their actions as parts of small groups and communities. This is in stark contrast to the socialist frame's emphasis on class based action, where consciousness of one's relationship with all other workers is a prerequisite to successful action.

The charge of 'elitism' is levied for a number of reasons. First, direct actions require training and planning within small groups. Second, they tend to be relatively high-risk (in terms of arrest or injury); people may have good reason not to want to take part. Third, particular actions are not necessarily advertised in advance, so even those who want to take part cannot.⁵⁵⁶ The primary response within the DA frame is simply that anyone is free to form a group and take on similar actions. By acting, a particular affinity group is highly unlikely to disrupt another groups' actions and in the context of large numbers of autonomous actions, is likely to provide 'cover' in terms of using up police resources and thereby increasing the chances of success of another groups actions.⁵⁵⁷ To the degree that groups are willing to coordinate in convergence centres, this effect can be compounded.

Within the anti-war movement there were a number of attempts to create 'mass direct action'. 'Foil the base', 'Day X' (see chapter seven) and the 'Independence Ball' serve as examples of this:

"We can 'foil the base' - disrupt satellite signals at the base - by having as much foil in the air as possible... This is the centre of the military machine - if only a fraction of the people marching in London take action at military bases the war will become unworkable."⁵⁵⁸

Two events have taken place at NSA Menwith Hill, a US listening station in Yorkshire that won prizes for its intelligence gathering during the first Gulf War are worth noting. 'Foil the Base' in March 2003 drew about 1000 participants flying foil kites and balloons and wearing foil dresses and hats. It was preceded by kite making workshops and the like all over South Yorkshire where people formed informal affinity groups with

⁵⁵⁶ 'Orson', interview, December 2004.

⁵⁵⁷ One detailed case of direct action within the anti-war movement will be used to explore these issues in much greater depth in chapter seven.

⁵⁵⁸ 'Foil the Base', flyer distributed in Sheffield, June-July 2003.

people they were travelling with. Explicitly supported by the Sheffield Stop the War Coalition (along with a march in London on the same day) this was an unusual direct action because it was planned very publicly with an effort made to get as many participants to the site as possible. The second on 4th July 2003 was billed as 'Independence from America Day - Gatecrashers Ball'. Again aimed at a mass of people, this was not quite direct action as portrayed in the media. Nevertheless, a key CAAB member (Campaign for Accountability of American Airbases) repeatedly entreated people to walk as close to the fence as possible, encouraging attempts to break into the base. Repeated addresses to 'those inside the base', by speakers, was also indicative of an attempt by organisers to directly affect their target audiences.

However, to the degree that these actions avoided elitism, they were not, in fact, particularly direct actions. The practical possibilities for direct action at an airbase are limited in any case, to either breaking into the base (and possibly causing damage to equipment) or to a blockade. The claim in the quotation above, that the presence of enough foil would disrupt the signals into the base did not seem to be widely believed. It was taken as an excuse for carnivalesque protest involving spectacle, giving the event a atmosphere of party rather than protest. Wide advertising ensured a very heavy police presence, thus making it practically impossible to cross the fences into the base. Blockades have generally been most successful when activists know how long each other are willing to stay and whether they will risk arrest. With a large group this knowledge is not possible and the blockade is likely to break down more quickly. Yet the hopes had been for some form of direct action. As one organiser told me, "Maybe two million marched in London to tell the politicians to stop the war. It failed, but yet there was still another London march. We got maybe four to five thousand at Menwith Hill. What if there had been a hundred thousand? Even fifty thousand?"⁵⁵⁹ Daniel clearly had a vision of a mass direct action that would have involved greater numbers, he may rather have seen protesters breaking the fences through sheer weight of numbers than through the careful planning and close group work that usually marks successful direct action. Yet the problems would remain. The DA frame contains repertoires of action and modes of organising that depend on small groups with well defined shared aims that seem problematic in the context of large group action.

⁵⁵⁹ 'Daniel', interview, August 2004.

4. LIBERAL AMBIGUITIES: THE RADICAL AND THE MASS

The historical material presented in chapter five described a particular combination of institutional action and popular protest as characteristic of the RL frame. I abstracted a detailed set of beliefs and values that shape issue-specific argumentation within the frame. The frame contains a vision of ‘good capitalism’ in which a set of basic human rights would be respected. These are morally justified on the grounds of human equality. As a result, unequal relationships that offer scant opportunity for the satisfaction of even basic needs are the primary target of critique. The abuse of power is understood as intertwined with adherence to economic theories described as dogma within the frame. The potential for overcoming dogma is seen in democratic institutions which may operate in both political and economic spheres, at every level from the local to the global. I argue that there is a tendency to work within institutional structures that is bolstered by a pragmatic attitude and the respect for professional expertise. At the same time, however, there is a willingness to utilise moral pressure and public protest. It is now necessary, therefore, to examine the meaning that popular protest has within the frame. As both the RS and DA frames are centred on non-institutional forms of action it is unsurprising that attitudes to protest within the RL frame have a strong impact on the relationships between various strands of the movement informed by these frames. That is, their orientation to particular forms of protest action flows directly from the desire for social change explicated by their analyses. I first argue that the RL frame does not automatically favour popular protest as a method of achieving social change. Indeed the ambiguous relationship between the frame and popular protest usefully foregrounds tensions within the frame itself. I will then examine the related usage of the labels ‘radical’ and ‘reformist’, which will greatly aid understanding of the intra-movement dynamics that appear in the following chapters.

Radical Liberalism and Social Change

The RL frame contains a number of apparent barriers to the wilful use of popular protest in order to create social change. These relate to the nature of the issues, the particular emphases of the frame, and the tradition that has informed proponents of the frame. I will discuss each of these briefly before moving onto more positive justifications for certain types of action.

The first barrier is that the majority of the issues with which the RL frame is primarily concerned are self-consciously altruistic. This accentuates the effects of Olsen’s ‘collective action problem’, cited in chapter one. Recognising this problem, Monbiot borrows the notion of empowerment I have identified with the DA frame,

arguing that it is through the joy of collective endeavour and exercise of agency that individuals will be enticed to participate.⁵⁶⁰ However, this is intended as a proposal for encouraging broader participation and does not closely match the justifications given by local activists working within the RL frame. Second, it contains a strong bias, through the pragmatic attitude, towards utilising the institutional structures that are currently available. Third, the strong tradition of national and international lobbying, made more effective by the command of particular forms of expertise, orients the organisations attached to this frame firmly in this direction. Fourth, the emphasis on empirical knowledge and thoughtful action fits uneasily with the strongly emotive character of street protest.

Nevertheless, the development agencies, environmental organisations and grassroots campaigners see campaigning and protest as an appropriate mode of action. Christian Aid, for instance, claim on their youth-directed website that “Popular protest looks like hard work – but it does the job... ‘the structural causes of poverty’... are the basic, underlying reasons why so many people are being cheated, and left on and below the headline. Campaigning is the only really effective way to deal with them.”⁵⁶¹ And, as described above, with reference to the planning of the Jubilee 2000 campaign, it is frequently assumed that without popular pressure in powerful democratic states lobbying work will be limited. Those who self-consciously form a ‘global civil society’ have always made claims to represent, on the one hand, those who through powerlessness cannot represent themselves, and on the other a moral constituency in the wealthy nations. Often lacking in any formal system of democratic representation, however, most organisations must rely on pressure applied through popular protest to ground these claims. From this point of view, the utility of popular protest is to strengthen the hand of NGOs within the institutions of global governance. This is another facet of the radical flank effect described above.

The more direct potential of protest actions may also be appreciated within the RL frame. Within the current cycle of contention the exchange of stories of successful action from the global south are frequently used to affirm the purpose and methods of the general movement. In a series of publications, WDM document uprisings understood as direct responses to the policies of the IMF and World Bank, the latest including 25 country studies. In doing so, they “chart and publicise the fact that

⁵⁶⁰ Monbiot, G., 2003, *The Age of Consent. A Manifesto for a New World Order*, (Flamingo, London), pp. 249-254.

⁵⁶¹ Christian Aid, undated, “We Want Change” on *PressureWorks*, available at: http://www.pressureworks.org/dosomething/why/we_want_change.html; last accessed: 15/08/05.

resistance is possible, that it is world-wide, and that it may eventually prove able to create real opportunities ... to open up new 'spaces' for alternative processes.”⁵⁶² Expressing a popular sentiment in the general movement, ‘Kenneth’ claimed: “we’ve got incredible power that we’re not using. There’s all this energy, all this power, there’s six billion of us, compared with a few hundred thousand of them, when you boil it down, and we’re letting them get away with it, just because they’ve got money.”⁵⁶³ Proving his point, he used an example of popular action against increases in electricity prices that were part of government preparations for privatisation in South Africa. The climax of that campaign had been the massed poor demonstrating at a local political leader’s house, cutting off his electricity and nailing all their summonses for non-payment of bills to his door. This is confrontational, non-violent civil disobedience and would fit well within the DA frame. But ‘Kenneth’ sees his own action in terms of raising awareness and putting pressure on British political institutions. To make sense of this within the RL frame we return us to two reoccurring notions: first, the idea that action must take place on the basis of a grounded, empirical understanding of a situation, and second, that one must start from the situation one currently finds oneself in, rather than an idea of how one would like it to be. In relation to the latter, one local activist explained,

“You’ve got your circle of influence and your circle of interest. They overlap, but some things you’re interested in you just can’t influence. So the influence I can have on parts of the world thousands of miles away is limited to things like buying fair trade... Here I might have more influence through joining a political party ... I might not like all of their policies but if I don’t join I can’t influence them at all. So you’ve always got to start from what you can currently do, and if there’s something you really want to change, you need to work out how to expand your circle of influence to include those things.”⁵⁶⁴

Combined with the understanding of protest in the rich world as largely altruistic, these notions bifurcate the justifications for protest. Situated in poor countries, and struggling against injustice that directly affects them, protest may be justified in a sense apparently close to that found within the DA frame. Situated in the UK, protest is usually justified as a way of influencing decision makers. Evaluation of such influence may rest on connections with lobbying organisations. For others there is a strong hope that making a public moral claim will, of itself, serve to influence decision makers. Even this justification, however, can sink far into the background so that the protest becomes

⁵⁶² Ellis-Jones, M., 2003, *States of Unrest III. Resistance to IMF and World Bank Policies in Poor Countries*, available at: <http://www.wdm.org.uk/campaigns/cambriefs/debt/stateunrest3/unrest3e.htm>; last accessed: 12/08/05.

⁵⁶³ ‘Kenneth’, interview, January 2005.

⁵⁶⁴ ‘Florence’, field notes, informal discussion, Sheffield, July 2003.

simply an avenue through which to make a moral statement, whether it is heeded or not. Chapter seven will present the clearest example of the latter, in which the intention to ‘make my voice heard’ was an often repeated rationalisation of anti-war protest. There will be a number of obvious parallels with the first wave of CND during which a combination of urgency, moral abhorrence and a belief in the unique position of the British government to change the course of events brought thousands to the streets.

One further justification for action for social change will further demonstrate the centrality of the anti-dogma position within the frame. The belief in the intricate relationship between dogmatic knowledge and the self-interested exercise of power confronts the activist with the need to rethink truths and re-imagine their understanding of the world. In repetition of a common theme from across all three frameworks, activists see themselves as facing an uphill battle to help others avoid a blinkered worldview, provided by elite powers, and come to a more accurate understanding. However, whereas the other frames are more prescriptive about what that understanding might be, the RL frame is strongly attached to the idea that ‘people should think for themselves’:

“what I’m really focused on now, is the need to open people’s eyes, you’ve got to help them go on a journey, but where that journey is going, where it will lead, is up to them.”⁵⁶⁵

“I’ve worked all my life in adult education and I think people just need that space and that time to think things through for themselves, which they don’t get in their everyday lives.”⁵⁶⁶

“The most important thing is people questioning stuff. Because once you start questioning stuff then wherever you go, at least you’ve questioned the status quo.”⁵⁶⁷

Each of these quotations demonstrates a very high value on the individual capacity for thought. The route to social change, from this point of view, is encouraging the willingness and ability to question current structures and power relationships. The moral outcry of popular protest might be interpreted, therefore, as a way of presenting an alternative understanding of the world in order to encourage thought. In their personal experiences of large demonstrations, however, we find the deepest ambivalence:

“if you want to get the argument across there’s no point in trying to do that through the medium of a large crowd, there’s something about the lowest common denominator in a crowd which is ... completely brain deadening ... [in the past] the biggest noise, and the best banners and placards, were from the SWP and they would take over the sound of the

⁵⁶⁵ Anon., field notes, informal discussion, Sheffield, September 2004.

⁵⁶⁶ ‘Graham’, field notes, informal discussion, Sheffield, March 2004.

⁵⁶⁷ ‘Orson’, interview, December 2004.

event with their single ‘Maggie, Maggie, Maggie, Out, Out, Out’, which is alright, but its about as brain-switched-off as you can get in terms of campaigning argument.”⁵⁶⁸

The simplifications of slogans and banners fit uneasily, therefore, within the RL frame. The urgency and injustice of a particular situation can, as we have seen, be used to justify many different forms of pressurising political elites. Participation in broad movements is therefore seen as one element of campaigning for social change. Simultaneously, however, there is a deep distrust of this as an effective method. The longer-term goals of those working within the RL frame are to encourage critique at the individual level. This notion is clearly akin to those of recruitment in the RS frame and propaganda in the DA frame; i.e. it is the basis of the reproduction of the frame in wider populations.

The View from Outside

Social movement ideas are defined in opposition. Within contemporary movements for social justice and peace we regularly find a double-opposition in determining political positions. The first (and overriding) opposition is targeted at the proponents of neoliberal globalization, which is seen, across the contemporary movements, as the source of great and increasing injustice. It is this that gives the current ‘movement of movements’ a semblance of unity. Within the unity we find a second opposition, which is against other strands of the movement. While this second opposition should not be overdrawn, it proves useful in understanding the particularity of the sets of beliefs that motivate contentious action, and give meaning to participants’ worldviews.

Within the contemporary movements, activists who utilise the RL frame may be labelled ‘reformists’, ‘liberals’ or ‘mainstream’ each with an implied critique that their ideas are not ‘radical enough’. At this point it is possible to determine the criteria of radicality that proponents might define. From the RS frame, radicality requires a commitment to a replacement of those currently inhabiting positions of structural power with organisations of the working class. From the DA frame, it means a complete scepticism about the possibility of working with those currently inhabiting positions of structural power without one’s project being co-opted or otherwise rendered meaningless. Those most likely to brand proponents of the RL frame reformist are, of course, the self-identified revolutionaries. This indicates the opposed starting points of the two frames. The RS frame begins with the certainty that class antagonism must necessarily lead to revolution where the RL frame centres on a claim that the only realistic way forward is to engage constructively with the currently existing structures

⁵⁶⁸ ‘Kenneth’, interview, January 2005.

of power. This is made abundantly clear, for instance, in a review of Monbiot's *Age of Consent*. The review appeared in the *Fifth International*, a journal set up by the British Trotskyist group Workers Power, and argued that the work aroused interest: "not because of what it proposes we should do - it is because of what it tells us not to do. It is a bourgeois programme with bourgeois aims. It would reduce the anti-capitalist movement to a helpless and incoherent pressure group."⁵⁶⁹ Monbiot (along with other leading figures from this section of the movement such as Walden Bello and Kevin Danaher) also face criticism from the other direction. One explicitly anarchist direct actionist argued that such figures wrongly legitimate democratized states and marginalise the stronger part of the movement by distancing themselves from the black blocs on marches. Tellingly, the notion that RL proponents are wrong in targeting only "global capital gone awry" rather than offering an explicit critique of the very idea of power is also raised.⁵⁷⁰ However, from the perspective of the RL frame these notions of radicalism are misplaced, in relation to violence, one local activist quotes Vaclav Havel, who argued that "It is not that we should shy away from the idea of violent political overthrow because the idea seems too radical, but on the contrary, because it is not radical enough."⁵⁷¹ Influenced by the ideas of pacifism, violence is commonly perceived as counter-productive. At one level, this relates to the use of violence on demonstrations creating negative images in the media. At a much more general level, the use of violence to achieve change is understood to be self-justifying and self-reproducing. Thus, states based on violent overthrow are understood as having a continuing basis on fear of violence in order to rule.

There are two lessons we can learn from perceptions that exist among other sections of the broader movement which, while critical, nevertheless have an understanding of the radical liberal frame rooted in a history of shared practices, shared opponents and political debate. The simplest lesson is a difference in attitude that colours the arguments and action of activists within each frame. Frames are not purely rational constructions, but much meaning is found through habitual interpretations that are based more in affective approach than in cognitive reflection. I have described both the RS and DA approaches as being imbued with a deeply oppositional or antagonistic attitude. By contrast, the RL frame is coloured by pragmatic and negotiatory attitudes. By this I do not imply that the values of the frame

⁵⁶⁹ Brenner, R. & Dewar, J., 2003, "Anticapitalist Manifestos: Monbiot, Albert and Callinicos" in *Fifth International: Journal of the League for the Fifth International* 1, p., 107.

⁵⁷⁰ Anon., 2002, "Anti-Capitalism as Ideology, and as Movement?" in *Aufheben* 10, available at: http://www.geocities.com/nowar_buttheclawar/aufheben_articles.html; last accessed: 10/10/2003.

⁵⁷¹ Vaclav Havel, quoted by 'Basil', field notes, informal discussion, Sheffield, July 2005.

are up for negotiation in any practical setting; on the contrary, we have seen strong value attachments at the core of this frame. However, those values imply both a necessity for listening and understanding that forestalls detached opposition, and an approach that seeks solutions in the here and now, for those who are, of necessity, embroiled in the structures which they oppose. This makes ‘radical’ antagonism a strategy that is counterintuitive, counterproductive and high-risk from within the RL frame.

Our second lesson is that we should, indeed, consider liberal ideology as the backdrop to the radical liberal frame. While we may remain sceptical of Fukuyama’s claims for the global victory of liberalism,⁵⁷² it has certainly achieved dominance as the mainstream ideological structure in Anglo-American political thought. The labelling of many within the RL frame as liberals or mainstream implies that they are not considered to be a fundamental challenge to the dominant political ideas and therefore, presumably share some of the core principles of liberalism. However, locating the RL frame within the ideology of liberalism is problematic. First, recent developments in the ideology have been of a deeply philosophical nature and take place at much more abstracted level of political thought than is typically the case within the movement setting. Second, partly because of its position as the mainstream structure for Anglo-American political thought and action, liberalism’s development has been diverted in many different directions with many different emphases.

5. CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from this chapter that there are a number of tensions between the three orientational frames described in the thesis. At times, different combinations of frames appear to be in broad agreement, for instance the confrontational attitude of the DA and RS frames, or the maintenance of individuality in the RL and DA frames. At others each seems to have an entirely distinct perspective. The overriding difference concerns the way in which social change is understood as achievable within each frame. This has two distinct elements. First, while each assumes that a critical perspective needs to be adopted by many more people from outside of the movements, this is understood through different processes. For the RS frame recruitment is essential in order to bring others to a consciousness of their class position. For the DA frame propaganda spreads a particular understanding of the world that will lead bystanders to taking action among their own groups. For the RL frame it is the mission to ‘make people think’,

⁵⁷² Fukuyama, F., 1992, *The End of History and the Last Man*, (London, Penguin).

encouraging questioning of the status quo, that will bring movement successes. The interesting commonality here is that each frame has a belief in the efficacy of belief. That is, they understand their own action as motivated by political analysis, and therefore assume that spreading that analysis will increase the potential for success among the movements. The second aspect of understanding the process of social change relates to more concrete tactical matters. While particular situations may lead to the use of different tactics, each frame has a distinctive tendency.

The current cycle of contention creates a number of spaces where the three frames encounter each other. Strategic and tactical differences come to the fore where there is a need to make collective decisions. This is exacerbated by the different approaches to decision making and democracy and the understanding of the nature of 'the movement' itself from within the different frames. Understanding such tensions as inherent in the organisations of ideas within orientational frames will be particularly illuminating when we move to understanding particular phases in the development of particular movements. It is to this task that I now turn.