Ballast Point Organizing Project

was the nuclear sub base with its shipment of Cruise missiles still on schedule.

By early June 23rd, all those arrested had been released, charged with "blocking traffic," a misdemeanor. Initially most of those arrested had refused to give their names or participate in the booking process in the hope of ultimately being sentenced to time served. This won't be clear until they come to court again, with trial setting happening in late September.

For its organizers, the June 20th action was a success. People putting their bodies on the line brought out the media; there was extensive coverage by every local major network and newspaper. During the 6 weeks of preparation, the entire San Diego peace movement was alerted. CEAN staffers, who did much of the leg work for the legal vigil, admitted they hadn't seen such levels of organizing and participation for one event in a long time in San Diego. Outreach for the action included a mailing of 5,000, a benefit showing of Helen Caldicott's movie, and the leafletting of base personnel with an "Open Letter" explaining the event in non-threatening terms.

Although largely symbolic, the action slowed traffic onto the sub base for several hours, disrupting business as usual. Through the outreach, the networking, and through the media the protest reached San Diego. The demonstration awakened the city to the planned installation of Cruise missiles on submarines based here.

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The protest and civil disobedience (CD) had been called by the Ballast Point Organizing Project (BPOP), an alliance of 6 to 9 affinity groups, to confront San Diego's role in the war machine. The organizing project was initiated by San Diegans who had joined the massive CD action at Vandenberg Air Force Base in March, where 850 people had been arrested.

BPOP is a smaller model of the Livermore Action Group, the Bay Area network of AGs that has for the last several years led CD protests at the nuclear weapons Livermore laboratory. And like LAG, it works by consensus. Each AG, with a membership of 5 to 15, makes decisions through consensus, then sends a "spokes" empowered to take those decisions to a council of spokes, which also works by consensus. Although ultimate decision making resides with the AGs, working committees made up of people from different AGs hash out options and details covering areas as logistics, legal strategy, outreach and media.

From Catholic militant, to pacifist, to socialist, to people just fed up and willing "to do something", BPOP has brought together people from a wide range of philosophies. It includes students, working and retired people, and feminists. Women make up the majority of the network and were a majority of those arrested June 20th. A women's caucus was formed that meets separately around different study issues. Ironically, the organized left has participated only peripherally within BPOP, although independent leftists and socialists work within at least three of the affinity groups.

The implicity unity of BPOP rests on a strident opposition to war and nuclear weapons and a willingness to either practice CD or support those who do. It represents for San Diego the convergence of mainly the anti-nuke movement and the peace movement, reflected by the participation of both CEAN and CARD activists.

Fall Campaign Against the Cruise

Able to sustain itself through the hot summer, a difficult season for any grassroots organization, BPOP is regrouping and beginning its Fall campaign against San Diego's production of Cruise missiles. This is in conjunction with international, national and already existing local campaigns around Euro-missiles.

October 24th is the next International Disarmament Day, and BPOP has targeted the Kearny Mesa plant of General Dynamics for its action that same day. The largest defense contractor in the country, General Dynamics manufactures both the ground and sea-launched Cruise missiles at its San Diego facilities. Upon completion the missiles are transported and stored at the highly-secretive Sycamore Canyon storage yard a few miles from the plant on government property.

One AG, the Mustard Seed Conpiracy, has already enacted a CDaction at the Kearny Mesa plant. After a 75 hour vigil, six members of the AG were arrested while attempting to enter plant offices on Hiroshima Day, August 8th.

BPOP's Fall agenda includes an educational campaign around conversion to peace-time civilian industry and about General Dynamic's Cruise Tomahawk directed at the community at large and to the workers at the plant. 4,700 of the workers at the plant belong to the International Association of Machinists, one of the more nationally progressive unions. Its president, William Wimpsinger, even has his own conversion program. But the local San Diego union is in such a state of crisis, BPOP has heard from union activists, that help for the campaign will not be forthcoming from progressives at the plant.

Interestingly, the issue of how to relate to the plant workers and, in a broader sense, how to build a movement to stop the Cruise, has caused one of the more sharper struggles within BPOP. Some AGs thought the action should not jeopardize or isolate the progressives at the plant during this period of union crisis. The crisis has been caused by a raid on the union by the Teamsters (the most reactionary, pro-Reagan union in the country) and by a reconsolidation of the local pitting its liberal wing against the more conservative ones over leadership of the local. A new contract coming up next Spring compounds the situation.

These AGs felt that a successful movement to halt the Cruise has to include the labor movement, and that a way to build links with progressive trade unionists was to respond to this particular union's crisis. They proposed a plan to do CD at the Sycamore Canyon storage yard. This would, it was hoped, relieve the pressure that could mount on progressive unionists because of the intensity of a large CD action at the plant. One affinity group concluded that a plant oriented CD action lent itself to a type of media-spectacle organizing that didn't deal with a longer-range strategy.

Affinity groups who opposed the Sycamore Canyon alternative did not necessarily feel responsible for the situation within the union or could not see how BPOP's actions would affect the IAM's internal struggle or its struggle with the Teamsters, given the nature of its president's own conversion program. The fact that some progressives from the plant were ambivalent or even supportive of a CD action there diffused BPOP's clarity.

Some AGs were critic of Sycamore Canyon as a site because of the terrain and its inaccessibility. They didn't believe first-time CD'ers would want to go to an isolated canyon. It would prove to be a much larger logistical nightmare, whereas CD at the plant would be more visible and accessible to the public and the media. They felt strongly that the CD protest as well as the legal rally occur at the Kearny Mesa plant, where after all, the deadly Tomahawk Cruise is produced. An action there would be in solidarity with working people all over the world.

With neither side wanting to actually blockade plant workers, the decision see-sawed through a couple of spokescouncils until it became apparent that a split might occur within BPOP over where to do CD. At that point, two AGs withdrew from the decision-making process, allowing the remaining ones to settle on an illegal action at Kearny Mesa.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Whether this new CD organizing project will stand up to the demands and tasks of the times will depend on its relative strengths and weaknesses.

The organizing project has enabled different groups and tendencies within San Diego's anti-nuke and peace community to work together, not just on a single event, but in a sustained way over a period of months. It has brought together some of the most dedicated and militant activists within this community, people no longer content with organizing or attending weekend rallies in the park, but who are willing to use their bodies to disrupt the normal business as usual of San Diego's nuclear and military establishment.

Because of all the different philosophies within BPOP and because of the over-riding group focus on CD, there's a real lack of any agreed upon strategy that goes beyond the next CD event. There's different ways of viewing CD: some see it as an educational tool and some use it as a pragmatic tactic to confront nuclear weapons and the war machine. Others see it as *the* strategy to disarmament or as a moral and spiritual stance of symbolic resistance. The symbolic protest vs. pragmatic direct action dichotomy within BPOP is part of the complex of factors diverting the organization from developing long-term strategic consensus.

For some this experimentation with their newly-discovered tactic has become an over-burdened fascination hindering a far-sighted perspective. Others hesitate to plan an action for months, only to be arrested after a few seconds of sitting down in the street. Still others want the group to widen its focus on Euro-missiles to include military intervention in Central America. So, until BPOP gains a clear sense of its direction, this absence of an over-all strategy will seriously weaken its future efforts.

The collection of AGs within the network does indeed reflect the composition of the largely white, middle class peace movement. And the biases of such a social base are evident in the priorities and styles of the organizers: the almost-naive approach toward jail and the legal system, the reliance on the media as an ally, and the focus on nuclear weapons and Europe, not on intervention in Central America or the Middle East—which could, after all, lead to a super-power confrontation and trigger a nuclear war.

Yet ultimately, it is an enlightening and radicalizing experience for white and middle class people to confront the government and the war industries. To directly confront those responsible for America's militarization, to up the ante, to risk arrest, is definitely a positive step for people with such a background. It places them in a line of collision with the sources of those white and middle class privileges, even as those privileges continue to exist. Getting arrested, jailed, and going through the court system, even for just a few days, introduces a whole new world to many of the CD'ers. The contradictions of a bunch of white, middle class people passing through jail for a short period of time next to their Black, Mexican and poor cellmates doing much longer time are obvious. And the contradictions are not lost on our direct action advocates.

Consensus: Refreshing and Frustrating

Importantly, what is simultaneously refreshing and frustrating about BPOP is the consensus and forms of participatory democracy built into the affinity group process. The individual's direct involvement in the direction of a large organization is heightened and assured. The autonomy of the AG allows for the organizing of smaller actions without having to get the formal approval of the entire organization. This develops the affinity group's own identity giving the individual a base with which to relate to the whole network. As the consensus process on the AG level assures that opinions of the individual will be heard, the AG structure not only protects the individuals participation, it protects the entire network by making each individual accountable.

The consensus process does produce many frustrating moments. During Spokescouncils, usually only spokes are allowed to speak. Everyone else has to find ways to communicate through their representative. Except in tense moments during an action, this method does not necessarily hasten decisions and it does inhibit fuller discussion of issues. With ultimate decision making power, AGs can continue to change or postpone consensus for the whole coalition. Developing consensus can be a long, tiring process and easily lends itself to the "long meeting syndrome".

The uneveness of the AGs, in either their resources or their ideological consolidation, permits the stronger ones to predominate. And at times a collective sense of the group as a whole and everything it is doing gets lost. Yet despite its shortcoming, the process is a positive experience for those burned by top-down decisions of past mainstream or progressive organizations.

Those so moved to action because of the dangers of war and nuclear annihilation have found in Ballast Point Organizing Committee a vehicle to express their opposition and moral outrage. BPOP has brought to San Diego a new level of tactics and organizational forms to deal with the new levels of danger.