C.D. AND SOCIAL CHANGE

In light of the recent civil disobedience at the Selective Service Headquarters, a number of questions must be raised about the effectiveness and value of such action. But, before discussing these qustions, I'll define C.D. as an act of rebellion within the system during which the participants desire arrest to draw attention to a particular situation. Direct actions, on the other hand, are those actions where individuals or groups decide to take direct control of their own lives and surroundings, purposely ignoring the established system; this may lead to arrests, but incarceration is not an objective—changing the situation is.

The problem with C.D.s is that they can backfire. Take for example the above-mentioned action at the Selective Service. Some 60 people, many of whom had traveled some distance, were arrested. The maximum fine they faced was $50 and thirty days in prison. Most did not receive fines or sentences, but consider the situation if all had been fined for a total of $3,000. Undoubtedly, some would have opted for prison and not paid. But imagine what 60 people and $3,000 could have achieved if applied in a positive fashion within the community, instead of into the system.

One possible alternative could have been to solarize and insulate the home of an elderly couply to demonstrate the feasibility of alternative energy and community self-help. If you were more interested in publicizing the Draft or another issue, $3,000 would buy over 30,000 copies of an "Emancipation"-sized free publication which these 60 people could go door-to-door with, reaching the community directly. There are many more possibilities, all of which don't get people on police computers as "troublemakers" or put money into the system; and I'm not even counting the other 200 people who chose to burn draft registration cards instead of being arrested.

(As a side note, you should know that the Selective Service opened on time and carried on business as usual despite the demonstrators or C.D.ers and the counsel for the C.D.ers suggested paying the $50 to avoid legal hassles!)

To bring the problems involved with C.D.s down to a personal level, I must point out that most people involved in C.D.s, as in demonstrations, get their rush, some excitement and feel that they've fulfilled their social commitment. Now I don't take this action for granted, most of America sits in front of the TV and lets the world slide by, but I still can't help but feel that many of these people are getting a false sense of accomplishment and are indeed taking the easy way out of the harder, less glamorous work of social change.

No matter how effective C.D. is in publicizing a problem, it does little or nothing to actually change the situation. Certainly, exposing the problems in our society is the first step in dealing with them, but anyone can walk through a poor neighborhood and point out half a dozen problems. The question is who is going to take the next step to do something about them. C.D. is limited to focusing some attention on an issue and leaves the real work of social change up for grabs.

Direct action, on the other hand, begins to make inroads on the problems of our society by making inroads on the very fabric of this society. That is, by going beyond simple rebellion against authority to ignoring authority altogether. D.A. creates a thinking alternative. D.A. does something to try to change the problem, not just point to it. Thus, bringing desired media attention. It starts to create a new society via personal experience where people think and act for themselves, instead of flipping levers to pick other people to do their thinking. And this, my friends, is what we anarchists are striving for—Social Revolution. Not political revolution where one authoritarian loses his head so we get a new king to cheer for.

All this does not mean that C.D. should be abandoned as a tactic. It remains a useful tool for bringing social ills to the forefront of public attention, as in the 60s when blacks sat down at "white only" counters in Woolworth's. But it must be part of a larger whole in which direct action is an integral part. For it is direct action, particularly when practiced by affinity groups, that empowers people, and enables the people to teach themselves how to do without authority.

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