At the Risk of Seeming Ridiculous:

Love and Place in Activist Education

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Abstract

On the potential brink of anti-capitalism becoming a normalized stance in Canada and the United States, the left in these countries still finds itself facing enormous difficulties getting its point of view across and in maintaining internal cohesion. A solution to this problem may lay in changing the motivation of those people involved in the movement. This paper argues that if they can be brought to be motivated by love for the people, and can be known to be so motivated, these twin problems may be easier alleviated. This paper examines methods for changing the motivation of activists within a lightly bound activist group, focusing on strategies that can be used by peers rather than educators or formal leaders. The strategies highlighted are drawn from interviews with new and old activists, members and leaders of religious groups, and educators. The conclusion drawn is that pursuing this end requires a dual path of strengthening the attachment of members to the group through building a loving and supportive environment, and building a norm of love for the people within the group, with possible means for progressing along both interrelated paths being discussed within.

This paper came from a desire to make a realistic assessment of where we stand on the road to revolution and the roadblocks we face at this very moment. Spending as long as I was going to spend in graduate school, I knew emerging only with criticisms of some things already past, or with a plan of action only applicable to some far off date, would leave me with substantial regrets. I needed to look at what is to be done, and what is doable, right now.

My key components during my research were to better understand our place on the trajectory toward armed revolutionary struggle, how better to transfer to peers what I have learned, and how better to transfer from peers what they have learned.

This first component was developed through studying the work done to undermine revolutionary struggles, and studying theories about the route and length of the path toward revolution. In Chapter 1 I touch on my rejection of any of the proposed short cuts or cheats for jumping our movement to its later stages (armed struggle and victory). Instead of wasting my time on developing skills suited to those stages, which would be a valid and important task if I believed they were within reach, (and is a valid and important task for some portion of the left at least as a hedge,) I turned my attention to tasks which match up better with current problems. This led to my focus on trying to counter the problems presented by liberalism in the movement (pacifism, leftism as a performative identity, etc…), and our significant propaganda/public relations disadvantage. This focus, which became a focus on "love" within the movement,

may not be an obvious component of an anti-imperialist/capitalist struggle, but is something analogous to focusing on patriotism as part of a plan of building a capitalist empire. If the basis and motivation of the organizing group has not been solidified, it is difficult to keep it together, demand sacrifices, move toward a goal together, and benefit from initiative and enthusiasm. So just like a nation state set on empire needs to focus on patriotism in order to overcome class solidarity and build racism before it can hope to run amok on the world stage, we need to develop and centre love in the movement in order to run amok on the ruling class.

My second component, understanding educational methods, ran through the entire project and especially the interviews. I've been feeling my weakness as an educator for a few years now, a problem I've been taking more seriously as my capabilities as a frontline organizer have been waning alongside my health. In this project I built upon what I had learned in my MES classes on education, partially by enthusiastically attempting to integrate popular and place based education, but partially through seeking answers to what I had to reject in those methods, as discussed in Chapter 2. Understanding I would not be able to wield any sort of institutional educational power within the left, and that I was writing for an audience that would not either, I sought insight into how to intentionally influence and empower peers, and how to structure a group to do the same.

The third component of my plan of study was a focus on research methods, in particular interview methods, and what I learned in my classes and independent study, (in particular in my participatory research class and in my

independent study focused on gun licensing in Canada,) formed the basis of my

method here. I was able to take what I'd learned from these sources, apply it,

and produce more effective interviews and better make use of their findings than

I would have before these studies.

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

If political power were handed out as a reward for accurately analyzing oppressive socio-economic systems, we leftists would already have the power to solve all the world's problems. Of course, this isn't the way power works, and we know it, but an observer might think that we really do think the world works that way. When we meet a new person and get it in our heads to try to recruit them, we jump immediately into arguments about economics, history, morality, human nature... and again and again we end up coming back to our comrades with the same story: the person we were speaking to has at some point shut down and shut us out.

If our arguments are sound, why do they fail? How is it that over and over, the truth does not prevail? Faced with these questions, we repeatedly question our arguments, our analysis, the evidence. We test our arguments with each other and try to hone them. And then we go out and face the same problems, the same rejection. What we don't question enough is the context into which we deploy our arguments. Even though we widely understand that the society we live in is heavily socialized and propagandized to be hostile to us and our arguments, we still act as if we sufficiently honed those arguments they would cut through all of that. What we aren't dealing with is the idea that the context could be made so hostile that our arguments and analysis trigger people against us, because they believe extremely negative things about the kind of people who would make those arguments.

This being the case, our first order of business should be changing that hostile situation. That could involve changing a lot of the basic ideas people have been painstakingly socialized to hold about history, human nature, economics, and the like, but that involves an enormous educational effort and isn't too different from trying to get through to people with our arguments. As daunting as it proves to convince someone that an alternative economic system to capitalism exists when they have been taught everything else is a failure, convincing them they've been lied to about the success of the Soviet Union isn't much easier. Further, doing so involves running up against the same conditioned triggers.

Where we can make headway is in changing what they think of us as people. This isn't actually that novel an approach, and is something of a go-to for brands when the market has been dominated by another. This kind of re-imaging has been credited with the turnaround of the Apple brand in the 2000s and George W. Bush's first electoral victory. Apple's marketers chose to depict their Mac computers as a hipper, less utilitarian alternative to PC's , and found an audience in people who considered themselves more hip and less business-focused[1]. Similarly, George W. Bush was sold as the person people would rather get a drink with than Al Gore, and his foibles and deficiencies were subsequently

1 Veroni, Clive. Spin : How Politics Has the Power to Turn Marketing on Its Head. House of Anansi Press, 2014.

given more leeway[2]. Without turning it into a marketing exercise, we can take lessons from these campaigns.

Our current public persona does not inspire goodwill. On the one hand, people take leftists to be heartless Machiavellians intent on rotting society from the core with our free *everything* and shared toothbrushes, on the other as hopeless idealists with no connection to the real world, and on the (perfectly-acceptable-to-have, all-bodies-are-valid) third hand, as bores arguing incessantly over dogma[3]. Worse than just being our public personas, these are very real tendencies within leftists and leftist communities, and often dominate our own views and experiences of leftists. This creates an inhospitable environment for many of us within our own movement, tiring and burning us out, frustrating us, and leading many of us to quit, or for so much of our energy to be devoted to internal unpleasantness.

I would rather be inspired. What inspires me is a movement motivated by love for the people, which takes seriously our challenges, and takes care of those who organize and fight for it. I think that is a movement we can become again, and that that is a movement that will inspire others. While I believe that the more we are seen as a loving movement, the more we will actually become one as

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2 Pillai, Rajnandini, Ethlyn A. Williams, Kevin B. Lowe, and Dong I. Jung. "Personality, Transformational Leadership, Trust, and the 2000 U.S. Presidential Vote." Leadership Quarterly 14, no. 2 (2003): 161–92. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(03)00008-0.

3 Somewhere in there, we're also considered annoying, doing things like arguing for the validity of all bodies, celebrating difference, ruining thanksgiving, making our mother cry, and a bunch of other things I won't apologize for.

that perception will shape our reality, the first steps must be taken in the direction of actually becoming one. If we pose as inspirational, we will have engaged in a lie about ourselves that will always nag at our ability to fully commit. Sort of like, if at the start it was ok to pose, then why can't we be a little corrupt later? And if turns out it is impossible to not engage in at least a little "fake it until we make it" behaviour, we should at least minimize it. Further, if a newcomer joins with the understanding that we are something we are not, they will have an excellent reason to become disengaged. So our project is not to hire marketing firms or beloved celebrities to change our public personas, but to centre our organizational culture around love.

This change is also one that will make the movement more resilient. Many leftists are operating under incredible stress due to their positions in this society, and then stress again due to the dynamics at work in the movement. They are often operating at the very edge of their limits, and their condition will either decline over time, or a new stress will be enough to push them over the edge. Being at that point is devastating enough, and is awful, without even thinking about how it will affect the movement—that effect most likely being that the movement will be deprived of this activist. A loving movement can minimize the stresses it inflicts in its membership, and offer support and strength that helps them deal with the stresses imposed by society.

For me, this will hinge on what is meant by love. I have been inspired in this project by the words of Che Guevara:

"At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality."[4]

The love he is speaking of is a love *for* the people, a love and devotion that revolutionaries put above everything else. It is not the kind of love that usually comes up when discussing politics: the liberal insistence that we all love each other, that we approach the enemies of the people with love. In the world in which we live, with the balance of power as it is, and the way that power is used, to be kind, loving, or forgiving toward those in power is to be hateful toward the people, to be complicit in their oppression. This is the kind of love I seek to promote on the left, the kind that inspires me: the kind of love for the people that inspires a hatred for their enemies.

This kind of love is valuable because it is in service on the people, not because it is love. The latest crop of neo-Nazis prefer to speak in terms of their love for the white race[5], nationalists at least claim to love their country, and plenty of crimes are committed out of love. Love of this sort is not an end, the way a universal love could be when the time is right. The love I want for those within our community, that support, the inward-looking nature of it, is only for now, so that with victory it can become universal. I only say all this to make clear the line between the kind of idealized love we can propose in religious texts,

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4 Guevara, Che. "Socialism and Man in Cuba." The Che Reader, 1965. https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/03/man-socialism.htm.

5 "The Cultural Politics of Emotion," n.d.

and the functional love that, if used correctly in service of the right cause, can get us to the kind of world those texts propose.

Like any moral being, I desire the destruction of capitalism and imperialism, with that the achievement of full communism everywhere, and recognize that the only feasible route to this is armed struggle. I've been on this task for a few decades now, and while we've made advancements in some areas, in others we've been pushed back or ground down significantly. This project has presented an opportunity for me to step away for a bit from the day-to-day activist grind to attempt an assessment of where we stand and what I might be able to contribute by way of an improved direction.

I've held financial positions in many groups over the years, often just because I was the only one willing to take it on, but over the past few years that's ramped up and I've found myself working on finances at a more advanced level in many groups at once, ranging from tiny ones trying to stretch a thousand dollars, to a large non-profit handling millions of dollars[6]. I looked first to this experience as source for a topic to which I could apply some expertise and offer up something both worthwhile and inoffensive enough to get it through a respectable institution like a university. What I hit upon was the very real problem of protecting lines of funding from the state, both for the security of the organization being funded and the funders. With the end of cash/full electronification of money coming rapidly upon us, I began a study of cryptocurrencies and money laundering, but quickly realized the problem I was

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[6] So far, no one has paid me anything for this, anywhere. One could easily wonder if that is loving.

investigating was more theoretical than real. While each group I worked with faced a very real risk of losing funding by having their funders threatened by the state, it was only the least radical of them, that large non-profit, that really faced much danger over this. Their capacities, such as they were, were not tied that much to their funding. The time may come when their continued success depends on keeping the money flowing, but that time felt far off, unreachable even. Not being able to afford helicopters isn't much of a problem compared to not being able to get to the point where you need helicopters. So, I took a pause in my research to zoom out, and better assess what our real roadblocks are.

I first looked to the Red Army Faction for guidance on my next steps. This can seem like a big jump, but in line with my assessment above of the need to defeat capitalism, and the means, it made sense to look at the more adventurist side of the left, to see if there's some secret to jumping ahead and ending capitalism now. The Red Army Faction failed, but if their failure came from mistakes along the way, rather than from a fault in their beginnings, I would be happy to see it. In their early work, The Urban Guerrilla Concept[7], they presented a broad, agreeable strategic outline, that the end goal of political struggle is armed struggle, but offered nothing recommendable about how to elevate the political struggle to the level where the armed now became appropriate. So they served rather as a cautionary tale. They claimed that they had assessed the current student movement as having progressed to the level of

7 Red Army Faction. The Urban Guerilla Concept. Kersplebedeb Publishing, 2009.

political struggle that would enable a successful armed struggle, and that they would prove that by enacting a successful armed struggle. While their attempt achieved several bright points, by their own admission it failed.[8] Taking their example seriously, and comparing the state of political development at the time of their origins to Canada right now, I confirmed for myself that we lack the level of political development here to begin a successful armed struggle.

I next looked to Che Guevara's experience[9], and Regis Debray's Focoist theorization[10] of it as possibility for getting around this trouble. Their theory is essentially that beginning an armed struggle would inspire people to rise up and join, and thus aid in the development of the political conditions necessary for victory. While I agree wholeheartedly from my own experience that violent struggle against the enemy is a powerful recruiting tool, I think they both mis-assessed the value of the political and paramilitary organizing that was taking place in the cities in Cuba, of which Che at least was frequently dismissive. This gave him a distorted sense of the power of armed struggle to elevate political struggle and development, which in turn led to his later military

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8 Smith, J, and Andre Moncourt. The Red Army Faction, A Documentary History - Volume 1: Projectiles For the People. First. Montreal: Kersplebedeb Publishing, 2009.

9 Guevara, Che. Che Guevara: Guerrilla Warfare. Edited by Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Jr Davies. Third. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001.

10 Debray, Regis. Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America. Grove Press, Inc., 1967.

embarrassments and death[11]. Again, I didn't see much to suggest that we could skip political development and hurry up ending this world-wide dystopia.

Discouraged, I turned to Vo Nguyen Giap for his assessment as to whether or not we could win[12]. Not only did he steadfastly claim that we will win, and from a situation less promising that ours, he laid out how and realized it in practice. This was promising, and enlightening, but did nothing to provide a means of skipping political development on the road to victory. Instead he made clear how strongly the military relied on the political development and commitment of the masses[13]. So, I put to bed the idea that we could just skip on ahead and really take final action against the whole system of global genocide, starvation, racism, murder, and slavery just yet. Liberation would require extra steps.

I looked then to Mao as the most likely person to give me an idea of where I should be looking to make a useful contribution. Whatever else you can say about Mao, he had a handle on politico-military revolutionary strategy, and is worth looking at on those grounds. According to his grand strategy, the protracted war, we should proceed along a three-stage path. In the first, the strategic defensive, we would look to our survival as a movement, develop our

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11 Johnson, Joshua. "From Cuba to Bolivia: Guevara's Foco Theory in Practice." Innovations: A Journal of Politics, 2006.

12 Vo Nguyen Giap. Once Again We Will Win. Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publ. House, 1966.

13 Vo Nguyen Giap. People's War, People's Army. Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2001.

morale and skills, and work to build the institutions to serve us going forward and after the revolution[14]. The second and third stages concern periods where our forces are equal to or superior to the enemy, and so clearly do not yet concern us. Some might object that we are not even yet in the first stage of this war because they don't see a war around us, or don't see us organized as military units and shooting at imperialist troops, but they're missing the point. They are already shooting at us, we're just not doing the tasks Mao has assigned to us[15], whether that's looking to our morale, or building our institutions and organizations. I disagree with the idea that we have to first fruitlessly return fire and so officially declare the war, before retreating and taking care of this business.

The tasks presented by Mao for this period are reasonable and inter-related. The institutions and organizations we should be building should defend the movement, build its morale, and develop its skills. Building the skills of the movement should allow us to develop institutions, defend the movement, and raise our morale, and so on... This meant that improvement in one area might improve the others, but weaknesses in one area might limit improvements in the others, and so maybe there would be one thing I could do to provide significant improvements, or things might be so negatively intertwined that there is no way forward without massive change and effort. All these things could also be true at

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14 Mao, Zedong. On Protracted War. [3rd rev. ed.]. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966.

15 We could be doing better, at least.

the same time. My hope was that I would be lucky and could find an issue where improvements could be made relatively easily, and where those improvements might create other benefits, and a kind of virtuous circle could be developed which might overcome other weaknesses and problems.

It was when I thought about morale that I came to my answer. It was clear to me that I was not inspired by who we are, and that many people have not felt supported by the movement. From here, the jump to wanting a movement motivated by love, and which is loving in its practice, was easy. Love was already what had motivated my whole project, what has driven my impatience to overcome this system, what made me accept the necessity of armed struggle as the task we have to build to in order to bring this whole thing down and end the horror. And that kind of love, I believe, could build the virtuous circle needed to achieve the tasks of the strategic defensive, to build them robustly so that their growth supports each other.

For guidance on how I could begin to make the changes I hoped to, I looked to the field of educational theory, though with hesitation. The traditional educational setting, criticized as the "banking model" by Freire[16], or as a "gulag" by Goyal[17], is set up in its methods and content to disempower the student. Even if that was what I wanted to do, the power structure, where teachers hold strong authority over students, and student attendance is required, would be absurd to attempt amongst activists. It is very difficult for an activist to acquire strong authority over another, and that kind of power is antithetical to our cause. Part of what makes that difficult, moreover, is that it is very easy to leave an activist group. Almost nothing holds someone in place, and when they leave people tend to just let them go.

Alternative education setups were more interesting, especially where they took seriously critiques of the banking model and strived for a flatter power structure. Sudbury Schools provide one model of a radically democratic model of school construction, though with some unsurprising caveats about the kind of hierarchies that develop within them[18], and their susceptibility to reproducing

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16 Freire, Paulo. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. 30th Anniv. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

17 Goyal, Nikhil. Schools on Trial : How Freedom and Creativity Can Fix Our Educational Malpractice, 2016.

18 Wilson, Marguerite Anne Fillion. "Radical Democratic Schooling on the Ground: Pedagogical Ideals and Realities in a Sudbury School." Ethnography and Education, 2015.

other problems in the general culture[19]. Taking seriously the idea that the structure of education itself could be a counter to those sorts of forces, I didn't find much to make use of in this model, except a reminder that democratization only really serves to recreate the template a society has socialized, unless a lot of work is done to undermine that.

Horton and Freire provided a lot of hope in that direction, especially in their discussion of the Highlander Folk School, for an activist educational setting that could be used to undermine the regressive socialization we are all subject to, but their discussion more than anything drove home to me the unworkability of the student-teacher relationship for what I'm trying to do[20]. The Highlander School is an extremely appealing model in a lot of ways, but beyond the unrepeatable power structure, it doesn't provide an easy to scale out model. My advice on how to change the culture within your activist group cannot be "start a school." I'm hopeful about the idea of a school that teaches how to change the culture in a group, and there I would look to the Highlander model, but here I want things that can be taken back to any group.

The kind of education that this project will have to look to then will have to be something interpersonal, and something that can take place in an environment where other actors have easy, near-costless exit options. To that

19 Wilson, Marguerite Anne Fillion. "Neoliberal Ideology in a Private Sudbury School." Policy Futures in Education 15, no. 2 (2017): 170–84.

20 Horton, Myles, and Paulo Freire. We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Educations and Social Change. Temple University Press, 1990.

end, and to understand what can be done I chose to seek out and interview people who have worked within groups with the same educational/power limitations, and who possess a similar orientation toward love. Although I did choose to interview two activists who I suspected would furnish insights, I didn't want to limit this to just activists, especially since if activists had figured out how to effectively motivate people toward love there shouldn't be the deficiency I posit. To that end I sought out some people working and living in religious communities, though I was careful in my selection so as to avoid the power issues I've outlined above.

In the interest of maintaining requested anonymity, each interviewee has been assigned a colour codename, and will be referred to exclusively by that name throughout. Interview subjects were chosen using the snowball method as I valued recommendations for insight over anything like a random sample[21], and subsequent coding and analysis of results was conducted along guidelines described in Qualitative Research methods for the Social Sciences[22].

My first interviewee, Red, is a teacher and leader at a Buddhist centre in Toronto, and former public-school teacher. The Buddhist organization Red teaches at is extremely open doctrinally, which has both made it a landing pad for new and prospective Buddhists, and a launch pad for those moving on to

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21 Atkinson, Rowland, and John Flint. "Accessing hidden and hard-to-reach populations: Snowball research strategies." Social research update 33, no. 1 (2001): 1-4.

22 Berg, Bruce. Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences. Ninth edition. Boston: Pearson, 2017.

more focused interpretations, which are readily available in the relatively plentiful Toronto Buddhist landscape. Having been a leader in this organization for a number of years previous I can attest to the extreme non-captivity of its audiences – people hop around to other centres and temples all the time. Red's public-school teaching experience is primarily with students identified as behaviourally troubled.

My second interviewee, Green, is a clergy member at a Christian church in Toronto and longtime activist. Green was chosen partially on their reputation and visibility in activist circles, and on grounds similar to Red. The denomination they represent is also extremely doctrinally open and faces similar issues. Green also has experience with activist circles going back to the 1980's.

On Green's recommendation, I chose my third interviewee, Orange, a lay member of the same church. In addition to being highly recommended for their insight, Orange's position as an active member rather than leader in the church is more similar to that of an activist working within their organization to influence it and its membership.

My fourth interviewee, Yellow, is a longtime anti-poverty activist who I have worked alongside for a few years and noted as centering love in their activism and approach to other activists. As an older activist deeply familiar with the same dynamics and frustrations I've identified, and devoted to the same transformation within activism I am, I especially sought their insight. Unfortunately, we found afterwards that both my audio recorder and backup

phone recording failed about fifteen minutes in to a two-hour conversation, so their comments are largely reconstructed from notes.

My final interviewee, Blue, is a newer anti-poverty and anti-imperialist activist, chosen on the strong recommendation of Yellow as someone strongly motivated by love, who has done much to foster a healthy activist environment. I also specifically sought their insights as someone who would be newly experiencing the activist culture, and may not have normalized things older activists wouldn't even notice anymore.

I sought initial interviews of about one hour with each person, with the intention of returning to each person individually with findings taken from the completed interview set for their further thoughts. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic hit shortly before I attempted the second round of contact, and each interviewee's focus was understandably elsewhere, so the second round of discussion proved impossible.

I transcribed the recorded interviews with an eye to capturing meaning rather than quirks of speech, with the hope also of being able to get the interviewees to sign off on or correct the transcription, but again the pandemic understandably stymied communication.

My interview method was to begin by approaching the subject matter in a focused and narrow way, with questions directed at answering the questions I have about my research. This wasn't done with the expectation that anyone would present ready-made answers, but more to make clear what I was wrestling with and centre it in the interviewee's mind. After that usually

awkward section of the interview, I would move to a more conversational flow where people would talk about their experiences in a less directed way, without it being explicitly about love, activism, or anything brought up in my questions. Invariably this was the more valuable section, as each interviewee drew upon reserves of experience and wisdom to embody the idea of being motivated by love.

In what follows I've categorized and organized their insights around a few key themes, and drawn out what seems applicable to the problem of this project. Organizing them into discrete themes when deep connections run throughout presents questions about how far to follow a thread that might flow into another section, and whether to apply insights from themes not yet discussed to ones under discussion. I've chosen to treat insights more or less discretely while discussing each idea set, and to let the connections build as they come. In Chapter 3: Findings on Educational Method, I explore the educational methods and understandings that will be required to facilitate changing a person's motivation. In Chapter 4: Findings on Compassion, Trust, and Listening, I explore interrelated strategies for both awakening compassion in a person and building in them a sense that they are loved. In Chapter 5: Findings on Community, Connection, and Safety, I explore methods for creating a strong and bonded community, which also builds within members a sense that they are in a loving community. In Chapter 6: Conclusions and Ethical Use, I discuss the continued need for what has been discussed in this paper, some changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, and how to make use of the methods contained in an ethical manner.

3.1 People are not Types

To develop a strategy for participating in changing people, we need to overcome our tendency to treat people as types and to behave reactively. Failure to do so will undermine our efforts from the very first. If we subconsciously see people as unchangeable and our day-to-day actions reinforce that view, a professed belief in changeability or policies to motivate or recognize changeability will only come off as dishonest.

In activist circles I am very familiar with the tendency to treat other activists as this or that type, whether as defined by their political tendency, their approach to organizing, or their personal interests. A person's type solidifies in our head fairly quickly, and it defines how we approach them. With our approach thus defined, we then contribute to their solidification into the role we've placed them in.

In Red's experience as a teacher,

> *RED: "Teachers are often kind of very narrow as in how they see who the kids are. So if a kid has trouble in a certain area, that becomes like this intense focus of the teacher, and it becomes a problem. So, "Jody's a great kid but she can't add," so the teacher's freaking out."*

While there are enormous differences between the activist and educator worlds, this kind of dynamic can be very similar to that between an activist groups' de facto leadership and those outside its inner circle.

According to Blue,

> *BLUE: "(In the activist group they work in) there are like three people who're in charge of things and they expect everything to kind of just continue on as normal anyways, and there's no recognition that you need to motivate people to come out to stuff or you need to reach out to them to see how they're doing to keep them there."*

People in the group are taken to *be* people who have come out to things, and so will come out to things; people who haven't organized events before, and so will continue not to; people who have not come to events, and so people who never will. The idea that people who have come out may need to be motivated to continue doing so, that people who have not organized may take on that role, or that people who have never come out to events could be brought out, is ignored. This failure on the part of the leadership not only limits change, it creates a divide between that leadership and the group's membership, and demotivates those involved.

Besides the lesson that we should not have a calcified group leadership that decides everyone's role for them, we can take away that as a group we will need to engage with people to understand where they are at at any time, and understand that that will also change. For Blue, in order to really overcome thinking of people as unchanging types,

> *BLUE: "...A lack of awareness is the biggest thing, an awareness of how people are doing and a lack of awareness that you need to pay attention to how they're doing. You need to recognize... that someone is a person who has their own things in order to form a relationship in order to form an organization."*

This allows us to change how we view other people we're working with, to understand that they are complex and have needs, which allows us to approach them more lovingly, and it also works to let them see that there is an attempt on

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other peoples' part to understand them, which is itself understood as an expression of love. The most clear route to this sort of understanding between people is to develop personal relationships with them, to really get to know them, but it is difficult to scale up an interpersonal tactic like this in larger organizations. Furthermore, even if we centre an understanding of the changeability of people in our conscious minds, we have a tendency to behave reactively in a way that again works to solidify our roles. While Red noted that,

> RED: "I was good at, or I was just naturally drawn to seeing them as relatively sane human beings, So I always taught to what was fundamentally good about them, rather than reminding them you know 'you didn't do your homework last night…'"

Red understood that they would still tend to make mistakes, either by treating students as types or by responding with the same sort of punishment-response that we've learned to use, so,

> RED: "If I did screw up, I'd try to pull the rug out from under them by rewarding them for fucking up. So the kid who had totally had a tantrum in the room was the kid I'd send to the office to pick something up for me. I did it for me as well because I didn't want to see them as being a problem, so I wanted to continually remind myself and them, it's the standard thing, I like you but I don't like your behaviour."

While this method of breaking the chain of bad-begetting-bad that underlies so many vicious circles fits well into the toolbox of a teacher or person in authority, it may be as difficult to scale up directly as the call for deeper interpersonal understandings made by Blue.

What underlies Blue and Red's advice, though, are in the first case a call to undermine our understanding of other people as types, and a call to

undermine our actions which treat and reinforce people as types, both ideas that we can scale up and put in place on an organizational level.

From my own experience I know that when I am trusted to do the right thing I feel respected and some pressure to follow up and actually do the right thing. Several of my interviewees saw this dynamic as the one that would ultimately be successful as the tool for shaping people's motivation toward love, while understanding that it wouldn't work "out of the box" and would require a great deal of groundwork to make useful.

In an ideal sense, Red advocated a fundamental trust, in line with

> *RED: "...the Buddhist training of really, on a real feeling level, you (believe) that people are fine, they're fundamentally healthy, and I don't really know enough about them to tell them what to do, so I just try to be kind..."*

At the same time Red advocated a role for intervention, using their power as a teacher to guide students. "I would notice some kid was a kind of giving person, or liked that kind of role..." and they would provide opportunities for them to be giving, directing them to kids who needed a friend or toward helpful tasks. The idea seemed to be that while goodness was fundamental, we might need to help people apply it. This seems a good enough tactic when dealing with people who you've already identified as giving people, but often conditions are less ideal. Often people are not "people who stand out in your mind as predisposed to giving" -- you just see them as people. What then?

In that vein, Yellow, who espoused similar feelings about the general goodness of people and the value of using in trust as a way of bringing out the best in people, provided some examples of a more pointed use of this strategy, providing some intervention in a more hostile environment in order to bring

about loving results. Yellow told a story of bringing children from their predominantly Black and impoverished neighbourhood in New York to an opera house, and using the white management's desire to be good, and to be seen as good, as a way of giving them an opportunity to "be a guardian angel" and let the kids in despite none of them having the money to pay for a ticket. In a number of similar stories they outlined examples where what could have been a combative confrontation was instead treated as an opportunity for people to be loving, and where people took that opportunity.

The strategy Yellow used in their stories would, as presented, prove too extreme within an activist organization. While presenting the desired outcome as loving certainly played a role in the choice made by the people Yellow faced, I think that they also chose it knowing that doing so would end the situation by placating them. Yellow was some random person from across town, and it was unlikely that saying yes to them actually meant they'd be back the next day with more kids. In an activist group, the relationship is ongoing. If we were to try this within a group, it would be missing part of its payoff (that they wouldn't have to deal with us anymore) and could result in bad feelings that would be carried into future dealings. We'd see the person as someone who might be willing to strongarm or embarrass us in front of the group and try to be more careful about interacting with them.

What does carry over from Yellow's stories is the role norms and audience played. These weren't backroom negotiations. At the very minimum there were a number of children present that the person didn't want to disappoint, or didn't

want to look bad in front of. They didn't want to appear racist in front of that crowd. They didn't want a confrontation of any sort. In other cases there were even larger groups present, watching. Within an activist group, we don't want to make use of this offensively, by setting up situations where failure to comply with a loving demand results in humiliation. What we want is a situation where the norms favour our desired outcomes.

During Red's tenure as a teacher of students identified as having behavioural problems, their school transitioned from separate classrooms for the "behavioural students" to a system where they would attend class with other kids, but with an extra teacher from the behavioural system present. It was in that transition that they made the following observation:

> RED: "One of my behavioral kids... made a fool of himself in the circle, but you didn't have to say anything, you just kinda would wait and he'd do it again and do it again, and say "are you finished?" ...And then I realized how powerful this was, to trust people's integrity that if you create the right environment then they'll settle. And that was much more difficult to do when everybody in the room had trouble settling."

As much as the tool that could be used to activate the goodness in someone can be trust, the ground it rests on is the set of norms in which people operate. Significantly, as Red story shows, these norms need not be the grand societal norms, which would place us at a disadvantage in using them against capitalism, but could be extremely situational. Students moved to the new environment with its new norms quickly adjusted. For us this means we stand some chance of building norms into our activist groups which favour the loving motivation I'm seeking.

An insight I have come to during these discussions and reflecting on my own experience is that much like it is difficult to confront and change capitalism head on from our current position, it is difficult to confront and change activist culture head on. The route that seems workable to me is to create a section within the community that practices new norms, and to grow it largely through being a good example which exerts a gravitational pull on others. This is factionalism, and so not exactly a new idea, but it might be a new and good idea to think about how to do it well.

Without that idea in mind at the time, the insights provided by my interviews already spoke to a similar plan. If we are to develop a faction with new norms with the aim of that faction holding together and attracting new people to it so that it replaces the existing forms of leftist organizing culture, we will both need to know what practices edge individuals toward the form of love I intend, and how to create a community that can form the basis of those norms, which people will value, want to be part of, and be willing to commit to and adopt the norms of. The insights drawn from the interviews are thus organized around those two themes going forward: creating the loving individual, and creating the loving organization.

4.1 Tonglen

The first practice presented to me as a means for moving an individual toward love was from Red, the Tibetan meditation technique called Tonglen. In my own experience, this technique is powerful, difficult to implement in an activist setting, and poses some potential problems in this project's context, but I still have hope that it can in some way be made use of.

In this technique there are several rounds of meditation, each of which with an object of meditation. In the first it is someone you love dearly, in the second someone you are neutral toward, followed by a person you have difficulties with, and then all living beings. In each round you envision yourself sending them your joy, good health, luck, whatever good things you can think of, followed by asking to take on their suffering, ill health, bad luck, etc... After doing this for a while, you progress to the next round, and repeat. The more sincerely you approach it, the more powerful it can affect your general compassion, your sense of selflessness, and your capacity for love.

In my experience as practitioner and as teacher, practitioners go through stages with it, first resistant to the idea of taking on suffering, then resistant to giving and taking with neutrals, and then doing so with enemies. As they overcome each stage, they do really seem to become more loving and open, so I take overcoming this resistance to be worthwhile. This resistance can come from lingering suspicions that they might actually be magic and might end up taking on all that suffering, or by mistake helping their enemies, but it more often

comes from a misunderstanding of who they're doing the practice for. When I speak with them afterwards, the core issue seems to be a fear that they're doing this to make them more pliant to their enemies/abusers/etc...

Red's experience with students has been similar, but they explain

> RED: "You're doing it for you. And that's the mistake people have with Tonglen that they don't quite get. You think because you're breathing in .... and breathing out, that you're doing it for them. You're doing it to soften your heart..."

If correct, then my main concern with this practice, that it would make us softer on our enemies, may be misplaced. Certainly, as a practitioner of this meditation since childhood, it is difficult to imagine how I could be less soft toward our enemies than I am, so in practice it maybe has not matched my fears. I remember an early experience where I managed to bring myself to practice this with Ronald Reagan as my object, and I felt a certain power being able to wish kindness on history's worst murderer. If anything, I think I hated him more after it, as the love I felt in rounds one, two, and four demanded. So, if this is true, and this makes us kinder, more loving people, without lessening our opposition to our enemies, then this could be an ideal practice if implementable.

If the section dealing with enemies really does give people too much pause, Red suggests one can hold back and still benefit from the practice:

> RED: "so if you can only soften it that much, that's fine. If you can't do it for your enemy, don't do it for your enemy, just do it for your mother, just do it for your cat. Just start out really small."

There isn't any magic involved though, and I don't think we actually do become kinder toward our enemies through this practice, so my guess is the true

problem with this practice lies in the difficulty in implementing it. Which may be substantial. Even in a Buddhist setting, where people come by choice and request Buddhist teachings and practices, it is a difficult practice to sell. In an activist setting where almost no one wants to have meditation forced on them, especially as the corporate mindfulness movement has poisoned that well, it may well be close to impossible. However, I can't quite bring myself to exclude it from this list, due to the power I know it has. It may just be that it can't be a first line practice, and that something else needs to first awaken a desire in a person to maximize their compassion.

4.2 Awakening a desire in a person to maximize their compassion

Compassion, for our purposes will be similar to the Buddhist take on it, that it is an understanding that all beings have the right to be free from suffering, the desire to end that suffering, and an understanding of the source of that suffering. The first two points are easy to understand as compassion, and fit most definitions. The third point, an understanding of the source of suffering, capitalism, is important here even though it won't be a variable — no one we're going to be dealing with in these groups is going to suffer from misconceptions about what to do to capitalism. What they will have to deal with is understanding approaches where the first two legs of compassion are firmly established, but where that third is not, and not to mistake this false compassion for the real thing. Otherwise it is easy to fall into, or see false alliance with, smaller approaches to love, things like charity and reformism, which may come to seem more appealing for how their *apparent* motivation resembles motivations which we'll be trying to hold up and strengthen. This understanding also helps us to avoid falling into these errors when we actually partake in charity-like actions, or use them for analysis as I will be here.

In conversation with Orange, they offered a method for developing a lust for compassion based in charitable action. Orange's idea was that many people don't pursue compassion as a virtue or activity due to a misunderstanding similar to that expressed by Red in discussing Tonglen, that you do so at a cost to yourself. Instead Orange found that when they gave to others, whether that was something like money or took some other form, when they really examined it

they realized that as far as they could tell they were the main benefactor, or at least they'd find that they had gained, substantially.

> *ORANGE: "You don't know the difference you make, and it makes an even bigger difference for you. It's a little selfish but people don't realize... there's no way (the other person) benefits more than I... We get, and this is perhaps one thing that I could say over and over, when you give a little love, a little concern, a little care, you get tonnes more, not just a little, for what it makes you feel, than the person there."*

While this tracks closely with what could be said about the selfish nature of charity, what it gets at is that charity, or service, can be used as a springboard into compassion. I don't see it as an argument for leftists to rethink the value of charity as a force for changing the world, as it remains something that benefits the giver more than the receiver, but as an argument that it can be used as a practice to allow someone who understands the centrality of destroying capitalism to develop an addiction to compassion. That understanding of capitalism should prevent them from a mistaken belief in charity as a vehicle for change, but the practice can help them see that the work they do to benefit others, that what they do out of love, does not necessarily cost them the way they may fear. This fear is a substantial barrier to the development of compassion, and this understanding of its benefit can do a lot to make it easier to pursue, so a practice that alleviates the one and makes clear the other holds a great deal of potential for our project.

It is, however, still true that charity can be extremely damaging in a variety of ways, so the goal must be to find either a means of achieving these goods without the bads inherent in charity, or to develop a practice of charity where the bads are as mitigated as possible, and the goods enhanced or

multiplied beyond any deficit. Both Blue and Yellow pointed to the monthly "speakers series" gatherings organized by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) as examples of non-charity service experience that they valued. During these events, members of OCAP prepare a large community meal that accompanies speakers on various topics ranging from police violence to ways of organizing. According to Blue:

> *BLUE: "The people preparing the food come from the same community, and it's important OCAP isn't receiving this money from the government or something. It's the community taking care of itself, and it's empowering rather than with charity, or religious organizations, where it's coming across — where it's from like middle class people who've given money."*

The key in this form of giving/serving being that the community is serving itself, and rather than a relationship of subservience developing, there is a sense that it can take care of its own. As a frequent cook at these events, I can attest to the strong difference I've felt here versus my experience being a recipient at church soup kitchens and food banks.[23] At the OCAP events, the people getting the food are relatively cheerful and make and maintain eye contact with the people serving it. When I've used church soup kitchens, or especially the food bank, I've avoided eye contact with the people doling stuff out, and watching others I've seen they behaved similarly. There are just not the same negative emotions associated with these events as with charity.

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23 I've only been to church soup kitchens on a few holidays, and none of the people I spoke to there were regular attendees of that church for food or worship services, so that may account for some of the issue. If I were to check in on a church with a more regular set of attendees I suspect it could be different. My experience of food banks has been more regular, and I don't think I'm missing their cheery side.

Considering that according to Blue, "eating with people is very effective in creating a community," this kind of practice appears very promising as a means of making use of the method suggested by Orange, while avoiding the pitfalls of charity. Speaking from my own experience as well, the people who cook together at these events also tend to develop strong ties to each other as organizers, so it can have an important role in creating community cohesion.

Importantly, all this has certain caveats, as pointed out by Blue. If certain thresholds of safety or security have not been met for the person attempting to be compassionate, it can be difficult or costly to make that attempt, something they've noted through improvements in their own conditions:

> BLUE: "That (being compassionate) has become easier or at least more accessible as (Blue's economic and home situation has become more stable). Something about stabilizing other stuff has really made it more of a good idea to be compassionate."

Some of this can be overcome if the community within which the person is operating has already worked toward securing and taking care of its members, but raises the question of what can be done if all members of the community find themselves pushed below this threshold.

Additionally, Blue pointed to situations where compassion may be rejected:

> BLUE: "I think some people might feel more comfortable or feel it's necessary to keep expressing love to someone who's clearly not going to accept or reciprocate, and if they're emotionally strong enough or whatever, they can handle it, but if someone doesn't know what the limit is, or what their limit is, it's awful and it's going to really ruin the whole point of this exercise. ...you can put a lot of love and compassion to people and it will go nowhere — that's a big lesson that I've had to learn... That's important to keep

in mind when asking people to do this. Immediately can be like "endless compassion is the goal of this," and yes, it is, but only when you can do that and have a well for yourself."

They see people as more likely to be laid low in a situation like this if they don't "have a well" for themselves, where that well refers to a reserve of emotional strength. Emotional strength is a broad idea. To some degree it's going to be affected by factors that aren't open to much influence, like one's upbringing, or some more deeply held points of character, but it will also be conditioned by factors over which we can, as a community, expect to have more influence. Stability, as mentioned in the previous quotation, can have an enormous effect on emotional strength, as can feeling supported by others, two things a well-functioning community can do a lot to build. So, while I take this limit to be a real one, and one that cannot be eliminated, it is one that can lessen if the person belongs to a strong and supportive community, especially one that is aware of and takes seriously what kinds of limitations people can face.

Following on the idea that belonging to a supportive community can enable you to show compassion, is the idea that being shown compassion will inspire you to be compassionate yourself. Blue had an experience along these lines when they first signed up to join OCAP. To join OCAP, you have to first go through an intake interview. It's not designed to be anything more than a chance to weed out people who won't fit into the organization, and to get a list of skills from the prospective member, to see where they can fit in. Blue's experience of the intake interview (led by OCAP members L. and S.) was something more than this minimal interaction, and they pointed to it as a particularly inspirational and empowering experience.

Specifically, Blue noted the value and effect of being listened to, sincerely and enthusiastically,

> *BLUE: "L. and S. were really nice people to come into OCAP with, during the intake that I had with them, S. was within 5 minutes asking me to start groups with her... And so listening to the things that I've done, and what I can offer, and then turning that into an idea, or turning that into now and future projects that exist in this current context and taking those skills and putting them into the current context was really cool to hear, that really made things that I did seem more real, or more important."*

The kind of listening Blue experienced went beyond mere paying attention. S. took what she was hearing from Blue, connected it to shared politics and interests, and expressed enthusiasm for working together in a way that made it sound like S. was excited to be joining Blue, rather than that Blue was being vetted for membership in an organization. The effect of this was to tie

Blue, S., and L. together within the organization, where they've tended to work closely and continue to care for each other.

At the same time, this kind of listening can be too aggressive for some people, on both sides. In some cases this can be because of what we could call shyness, bad experiences, or any number of other things.

> *BLUE: Some people aren't going to be as comfortable as others to talking to random people, and people can get put in more defensive positions when they're forced to, or react to it differently.*

In other cases, it may just not be appropriate for the situation or subject matter. My own experience with listening suggests that even a less active kind of listening can produce very loving results. Within a Buddhist organization where I was somehow a leader for a number of years, I often found myself in a position to listen to people one on one. People came to me in my office, or when I was in public areas during retreats, and spoke to me. If they had questions, or it was on theological or practical matters, I would provide answer attempts, but they much more often wanted to tell me deeply personal and often very painful things where I felt my clear role was to listen as lovingly as I could. I would sit with them, look them in the eyes, and really try to take in what they were saying without jumping in, trying to provide answers, or do much active at all. I would try to just be there for them, and to love at them. I didn't really have any instruction on what I was supposed to be doing, but it seemed to go well enough. Gut-wrenchingly, many people told me some variation of "it's been so long since anyone has listened to me," which suggests that listening is in such short supply

for people that even in its most basic form it is highly valued and can feel like a deep expression of love.

I also found that people who had been listened to in this way eventually became the people who sat for and listened to other people, which suggests to me that when someone find themselves loved and supported in a way that really touches them, that they will then be inspired to offer that same thing to other people.

My experience with the interviews for this paper left me thinking that interviews of this sort also have their place in this project. The feedback I received about the process was extremely positive, with the process itself described by a few as loving or as promoting love. Partially some of this can be attributed to the effects of listening and connecting, but I think some of it has to come down to a kind of power of suggestion. If I somehow talks you into being interviewed on the topic of "how to fix the problem with x," I think you'll likely find yourself more concerned than you may have been previously with the problem with x, and you're likely to feel a little respected and like an expert on the topic[24].

Within a community centred on developing a loving motivation within the left, regular interviews of members could be a powerful tool for both expressing love and keeping people connected to loving motivation as a goal. Before the

24 I was interviewed when I was around 15 on what it's like to be a celebrity, and I think I spent a few years semi-convinced that I might actually be some sort of unknown celebrity.

COVID-19 pandemic shut things down, we were working on a proposal based on this idea within the membership committee of a group I belong to. The proposal would be that we conduct yearly interviews with the membership. The idea was not going to be to talk to people about loving motivation, but to ask them about how they felt about the organization, their place in it, how things were going over the past year. There wouldn't be the explicit love message involved, but people could feel more listened to and seen within the organization, which can be something easily missing in especially larger groups. It seems the kind of intervention that can be taken up by groups even if their explicit goal isn't to modify people's motivations, which may be able to do a lot to improve the internal culture, or at least help in identifying problems.

5.1 Community

A community with desirable norms is only useful if people want to be in it, if they want to *stay* in it. Good norms can help make the community desirable, but it takes more. A created community can be very fragile, with its members capable of and willing to exit very easily.

In speaking with Green about their experience providing mediation for activist groups, they told me they'd never actually been part of a successful mediation. The best results they've seen have come when the two sides part amicably. However steady their political commitment, there just isn't the same commitment to the existence of the group. If I can continue to do the same activism I prefer, and do it without having to win battles over how to do it with a group of people I disagree with, it can be very hard to find a reason to keep working with them.

> GREEN: "Successful mediation only happens when people have a very deep investment in staying in relation with each other, like a deep, deep, deep investment, and are willing to give up on both sides. First thing I say in a mediation is that both sides are going to have to give up something, and usually one or both sides withdraw because no one ever wants to give anything up."

In activist circles, there is often very little done to create this investment. We are united by a political agreement, or maybe excitement, and we don't do enough to move it past that. As example, during the anti-globalization movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the was a surge in membership in the leftist groups I was working in. People were very excited to join, to come out to events, and even do organizing work, and we were excited to have them. The new people

were coming from a new demographic, usually middle class, often students, but this seemed exciting initially – if we were drawing people in across class lines, surely we were winning. There didn't seem to be much reason to give any thought to building cohesion and getting people invested in the community, I think partly because we didn't know any better, partly because we felt like we were on such an enormous upswing that maybe revolution was about to happen soon, and partly because it felt like we might drive people away if we asked too much. People who could afford to pay actual money to other people to cut their hair were hanging around asking me how to shoplift and throw knives, and it felt too rude to ask what would happen if the riots ended, or if Mike Harris left office, or if they graduated. Then when the new people left, not understanding, I just assumed they were taking a break. It's hard not to look back on myself then as some sort of pathetic puppy dog not realizing I'd been abandoned, but when I look past any hurt feelings, I see the weakness of the bonds that held us together, and how little almost anyone I knew took seriously the task of building a cohesive community. These people were not involved because they needed to be, but because it interested them, and when that interest dissipated or something new came along, it was easy for them to leave.

This isn't a mistake I want to repeat with this project. If I can gain people's interest in creating these new norms, and a community around them, I want to strengthen that community so they are committed even when new things come along. This is difficult with a community of choice, but it is achievable. Green explained that faith groups do very well at this because people entering them know at least somewhat what they're signing on to:

GREEN: "Faith groups have that advantage - it is a community, people know they're coming into community, they're not just coming into a group where you get things done, you're coming into community. And that's understood by almost anyone who goes into any kind of faith group, that this is about a community."

For an activist group to make use of this advantage, people will have to know going in that it is a community. For existing activist groups, formed not at all on those grounds – so often more as the kind of "group where you get things done" Green described — this would be difficult. So it is clear we either need to create a new group, or a faction within another group. Since there are already so, so many groups, as I've said I think it's probably best to just think of yourself as a group within a group, and grow from there.

My interviewees, when asked about cohesion in a community of choice, about what would keep them there and make them committed, repeatedly pointed to feeling safe and feeling connected, so that's where I'll turn.

5.2 Connection

A mistake I made with the anti-globalization activists was assuming that our shared political ideology meant we were in a secure community, a mistake I made because I didn't understand that ideological agreement creates a weaker community than class[25]. Adopting a political ideology doesn't really have to change your behaviour. My friends in Toronto have experienced an epidemic of bosses/workplace owners who claim to "actually" be Marxists, but who behave every bit the petite bourgeois fascist in the workplace.

Being poor is different than this because poverty imposes on the poor person. We have to do something about it. If I decide to not do anything about my poverty anymore, I will only become poorer and sicker, and since I view left wing organizing as the thing to do about poverty, it is what I have to do. I share this with many other activists, and we tend to recognize that connection between us, and its strength.

This kind of connection is strong and does not need tending:

> BLUE: "those relationships that have just formed that way... have been really long lasting and I think beneficial for both people, and those others that have formed over this other stuff they've worked for a while and then you're just focusing on the differences way too much to the point where it's just uncomfortable and those relationships fall apart."

It is exciting to identify a kind of connection which is strong and automatic, if strong connection is essential to a strong community, which I

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25 The same can be said of race, gender, etc...

believe to be true, but if strong connection can only be the sort of naturally arising connection something like class creates (naturally occurring in that it isn't created through something like our conscious effort, but through outside conditions), then the future is the bleak. Community would be dependent on identity and organizing would be necessarily siloed. The future depends on us overcoming that barrier and building connection across those lines.

While I believe that that can one day take the form of the shared understanding of the way this society oppresses us, the kind of thing Paulo Freire[26] worked to set up and that Fred Hampton excelled at[27], at the moment and in this project I think we have to think a bit smaller and interpersonally. The seeds of that larger understanding are already there, bringing the individuals together in a shared activist group, but I think the strength we are going to be able to use at the beginning is personal.

For Blue, one way of doing this was connecting over the work itself and their shared experiences with it,

> BLUE: *"There's all of this stuff that could have been potential barriers between us, like class or race or experience with homelessness or being housed, having kids is probably a big barrier between women, but I think we were able to transcend those barriers and, no one was explicitly saying "isn't it nice when only women hang out!" although I wouldn't have been surprised if they had said that, but we're all there and we're all interested in each other even though there are all these differences.*

[26] Horton, Myles, and Paulo Freire. We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Educations and Social Change. Temple University Press, 1990.

[27] Haas, Jeffrey. The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and the Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010.

And maybe that sticking solidarity point is we all care about this thing, and we all have different relationships with it... I care about antipoverty issues I care about poverty and homelessness and so that way we have found the mutual interest is strong enough and affects us emotionally enough that that's where we're going to form solidarity around it."

This runs very close to the kind of weak connection I've discussed between poor and middle class activists, and identity connection, but I think the difference is that the connection Blue is talking about being forged is multifaceted, and is based on a connection to the shared experience of doing anti-poverty work.

In this case, Blue theorized that the grouping they were in at that moment was highlighting their shared identity as a way of connecting, as a way of getting over the hurdle of difference. The motivation for this appears to be the shared commitment and experience of anti-poverty work. This seems similar to the way unlikely friendship happen in workplaces, or maybe better the way friendships can develop across major lines of difference due to shared obsessions. I want to cautiously endorse this way of developing connections as something more than the sum of its parts, and more than the types of weak connection I complained about earlier because the connections Blue is talking about here have indeed proven resilient, and this is their account of them. However, my caution leaves me wanting more.

According to Green, strong connections can be forged between people by taking the time to do good toward them.

GREEN: "Good can be very small, just noticing other people. I think just really noticing other people is rare enough that it makes an impact. Sadly, it's that unusual to just really notice other people."

The whole of their comment, but especially the last sentence reminds me of my experience of listening to people, where they would say that they haven't felt listened to in a long time, and drives home the murky barriers between talking about community, love, and connection. This makes the project of dividing up analysis for a project a little difficult, but points to the virtuous circle involved in building a community to promote love: the love that the community promotes, itself strengthens the community, which then promotes its ability to promote love.

This idea that being good to someone is noticeable and will build a connection with them, though different than the type of clear, connection-through-identification Blue pointed to, is a subtle type of connection-through-identification itself. To have a good thing done to you without provocation implies your worthiness, and that you can act this way yourself (within this community, at least). To go back to my experience in a Buddhist community, I found that people came to identify strongly with those they felt saw good in them. They saw me as good, they saw that I saw them as good, and they then saw themselves as good through their respect for me. Properly understood and used, this can be an extremely powerful, almost too powerful[28], tool.

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28 The finance department which I ran quickly became the biggest section of the organization through this means, and other sections of the group found themselves needing to request that FD volunteers be seconded to their section to help with things like retreats and group meditation. For my part, I had a large finance department full of people who were (in the end quite wrongly) confident they must be able to do accounting because I had been "sure they wouldn't have a problem..." This is a powerful method which should not be miss or over-used.

My main takeaway from the discussions on connection, and my experience, is that it cannot be treated as something which once achieved is then permanent. It is subject to the same tendency to decay as most other things, and so it will be something we have to always work at with each other. That may even be the secret underlying the failed connection I felt with the middle class activists. We had different backgrounds and means, which meant they tended to use their free time differently. To maintain their lifestyles once school ended, or their families stopped subsidizing them, they needed to have fancy jobs that stole up all their time. While the time we spent on activism was overwhelming, and while we could all survive without outside obligations, we were able to connect.

If this is the case, a key tool in creating connection could be the creation of plenty of activities outside of the activism which will plainly just keep us all near each other. The first can be meals, as suggested by Blue, and other social activities. A second part of this would have to be finding a way for people to live without having to work constantly, or at least separately. I'm happy to suggest that as a goal but coming up with a plan for it is outside of what this project can accomplish.

A chosen community where its members do not feel safer around each other will, if it does not just fall apart, cease to function for those who are in fear. This doesn't necessarily mean a community where anyone can be made safe from mistreatment, nor does it mean a community where you are only safe to do the exact right thing. The reality of living under capitalism is that we have been socialized in several terrible directions and overcoming these is a struggle.

This society socializes us to be afraid:

> GREEN: "we live in a society that so relentlessly encourages people to see other people as threats to themselves, that you can try to be a countervoice to that message, but the message they're getting from the whole society surrounding them is so strong, it's amazing there are people who are able to break away from that."

According to Green, this is the very source of the problems this project seeks to tackle. Selfishness, rationalism, cruelty, stridency, all are encouraged by fear:

> GREEN: "I think often it comes out of fear. I think frequently it's because on some level people really perceive themselves, their safety, their being to be under threat so they respond by putting up these walls and being very self-focused…"

As this leaves open the hope that "…if you can have a place of safety, if you can make people see that they're not threatened they can let go of some of that," Green sees creating safety in a community as of paramount importance to the rest of their, and its, purpose. To that end, Green sees their primary role in their faith community to be:

> GREEN: "To try to be that counter voice, especially to try to live in a way, to try to create a space that says to people, not in a

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verbal way, that other people are not a threat, that compassion is not a threat, that existentially we are safe, and because existentially we're safe, and that for me that's a theological concept, we are held in the love of God, so ultimately whatever happens we are safe, that all these messages you get that other people are trying to take stuff that should be yours, or other people are threatening your rights or your whatever, in the face of the knowledge that you are existentially protected in the face of God all these things would be irrelevant. Very few of us are existentially developed enough to feel like that all the time. A lot of what I try to do as a priest, as the leader of a faith community, is to try to build that sense of existential safety, the sense that God's love is a kind of safety that allows us to risk vulnerability."

While this countervoice role is in line with what the community I'm seeking needs, a leftist project can't as easily be undergirded by the same idea of existential safety provided by an all loving god. There are leftists of every faith, non-faith, and anti-faith, and there isn't a general acceptance of anything like existential safety in the hands of a loving god. That kind of safety isn't exactly what this group needs, anyway.

A safety that allows us to be loving and compassionate, that restores those who are generally held down by society, that is the safety that will enable the group members to be more loving, and make continuing to be a part of this community attractive. A safety that makes us feel like the problems of society do not need to be overcome is instead a serious problem. The kind of safety where this community becomes too much a refuge, the kind of thing I saw in the Buddhist community I worked in, that would do us no good. As much as it could be enticing, the idea that we can provide an actual safe refuge from this society is beyond our current powers anyway.

Green understood that I wouldn't be able to propose making use of god's loving embrace in an activist community, and so tried to help break down what

was key to the role they were describing, deciding that in the absence of transmitting an existential interpretation "...It requires commitment, and it requires vulnerability, and how do you make that space for people to be vulnerable."

For Yellow, a key to creating that safety is standing up for people, making sure they don't have to do it themselves over and over. They said that for example if the white people in a group always left it to them or other people of colour to call out racism, it would indicate either a lack of concern, a lack of understanding, or a lack of willingness to stand up for them even in a relatively safe situation. Any of those interpretations would mean this is a setting where you have to remain on the defensive, to put up walls. On the other hand, if people other than the target of an oppression readily identified it and stood up against it, it would communicate that "I'm not letting you stand alone." This was more important to Yellow, or more achievable, than the idea of a group purged of the effects of oppressive socialization. If people can be counted on to stand up in solidarity against these issues, and the group responds, that group will feel as safe as can be expected, and allow for some of that vulnerability.

The other side of this is that the calling out, if it involves a person at fault who can be spoken with directly, can be done in a way that makes having an issue addressed feel safe.

> YELLOW: "I say what I have to say without making people defensive... If you were to be doing something that has been socially and systemically taught for you to inculcate as a ground of being, and I wanted to call it out to you, I would address it as such. And I wouldn't address it to you as your behaviour, I would

address it to you as your learned behaviour. Sometimes we don't know how to do that, and we just attack the person, we don't attack the historical systemic ideology that has been perpetuated for centuries.

By understanding the socialization at the base of racism, ableism, etc., it can be made the target, rather than the person, particularly in a situation where you're confident, or willing to go along with the idea, that the person has just slipped up, missed something, not understood the history, etc... If all goes well, they can then avoid falling into defensiveness over the callout, and can view this community as a place where they can be supported in struggling against their socialization. This wasn't to be understood exactly as a tactic for use out in the world, or a call to mistake a general bad faith on the part of the right as a misunderstanding, or to bend over backwards for racists, but instead something that can be used in an otherwise safe seeming situation with trusted comrades.

When in doubt about the situation or the person, where safety doesn't quite seem established, Yellow suggested that when we come to the person to address the issue, "do not come from directing. Pose it as a question. A question is more opening." Similarly, Red suggests using questions when dealing with people you find difficult or who you don't have an understanding of. "Ideally you say, given how you see the world, how can I help you?" In both cases, questions involve a certain humility, gesturing to the person a certain lack of judgment, that you're troubled by something, but haven't written them off.

Red cautioned further against writing people off, and talked a bit about making community with people you just don't like. While there are cases where getting to know the person will help you overcome that dislike, in some cases it's

just not going to happen, which Red felt it was important to accept and be ok with. If a chosen community is going to survive, and grow, its members are going to have to figure out how to make peace with and make safe people they just don't like.

> *RED: "Some people are just very different, and they see the world differently and the best thing they can do is try to make friends with their particular flavour and go for it... I just see it as one of the many flavours that people have to work with, and they have to make friends with it."*

This piece of advice was one of the more important and realistic that came up during this research. Besides providing a specific reminder that neither society as a whole nor the left can ever just be a big group of friends, and will always involve conflict, it is a good reminder not to fall prey to utopian thinking with this project in general. The community will not be safe, but it can aspire to and make use of being safer; it will not have a 100% Che Guevara creation rate, there will still be people with less helpful motivations; there will still be people who will not be convinced, no matter how lovely they come to think leftists are as people; the work will still burn us out. If we don't keep that in mind, we might treat imperfections on the path as signs of failure and cues to quit, itself not a loving approach.

I began this research at a time when burning down a police station in anger at police brutality would have been expected to poll significantly lower than the 54%[29] it did, when we couldn't expect to get a politician to talk about defunding the police, much less abolishing them, when overuse of the word "socialist" as a term of abuse hadn't yet let the moderate liberal Bernie Sanders to claim it and somehow revitalize the word in the United States. A lot has changed in a way that can obscure that we are still facing the same challenges, and we still have the same work to do internally. Even if the United States is going to burn in November, in Canada we're probably looking at a situation that continues to require that we build our organizing capacity, that we change people's perception of us, and above all requires we work together to survive. Regardless of the sure-to-be-unprecedented times ahead of us, the problem I've tangled with still stands, and the solutions I've found are still a beginning worth building on.

Like most things, these ideas will have to be tested by use in the community. Also like most things, these must be done consensually, not treating the left as an experiment or our membership as something to be manipulated. Doing this consensually, working toward a shared goal with shared input and a

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29 Impelli, Matthew. "54 Percent of Americans Think Burning Down Minneapolis Police Precinct Was Justified After George Floyd's Death." Newsweek, 2020. https://www.newsweek.com/54-americans-think-burning-down-minneapolis-police-precinct-was-justified-after-george-floyds-1508452.

shared plan is that kind of leftism that is inspiring, that is loving, and is motivated and conditioned by love for each other.

Something left out in the interviews, but which I later reflected on with envy, was the role physical space could play in community. The Christian church and the Buddhist centre both held their communities together by providing a venue not only for their main activities, but for many other activities. They were both used as a place to gather and eat, and provide non-religious services to their communities. They were useful hangout places for people. They both seemed separate from the world at large, a sort of respite. And in both cases their membership treated the actual space with respect, volunteering to clean it, taking care with opening and closing the doors. We activists rarely have a place like that, and it might be the case that we shouldn't, at least as a central organizing venue, but it's where I find my thoughts heading for the future.

For the moment, with the COVID-19 pandemic in its early stages, the left can't have communal spaces, and much of what we can do together has had to change. The way forward, however, is still love. Many who had thought they could get by without community support are seeing their loads lightened by the rise of care networks, and others are enjoying and learning from their opportunity to help. As someone whose underlying health concerns has led to them being advised not to leave the house except for medical emergencies, I am aware that my life is being saved by these care networks, and I struggle to make sure that the friends bringing me groceries know that they are loved. I have heard from Blue that they are in the process of starting up an expanded care

network, that can do more than drop off groceries, and am happy to hear that they are trying to make love, rather than just utility, central to the project. Come the end of the pandemic, I hope these care networks can continue, especially as I've seen how much people who need them on a regular basis struggled to get them set up before COVID-19.

Though COVID-19 stresses meant I was unable to go further with my inquiries with my interviewees, I have heard back from a few of them, who wished me safety and thanked me for the conversations we had. They said that the process had meant a lot to them, and that the conversations had stuck with them and proved important in their lives. Each of them hoped to be able to talk and do more on the topic once things became safer.

Coming from a very action-oriented side of the activist world, I struggled with the nature of this project. I'm used to being able to put into practice pretty much immediately any idea I have, thinking it through as we actually do it, for better or for worse. I had hoped to produce something actionable, something more readily deployable into the activist world, but declining health, a pandemic, and the deaths of three computers led me to settle for the time being on a paper. When the pandemic passes, or whenever it becomes possible for me to exist out in the world again, I intend to be front and centre in making the plans in this paper into a reality.

I began by stating my problem: where I see activist motivations currently and where I want to get them to be.

Questions:

1. How do you think you could change someone's motivation in this way?
2. Do you view yourself as motivated by love? How did you come to this motivation?
3. Why are people instead motivated by selfishness/rationalism/stridency/etc… instead?
4. How do you use your position (teacher, community leader, community member) to move people toward a loving motivation?
5. How does that differ from when you are in your day to day life? (As a friend, family member, stranger.)
6. How do you relate to people who have motivations you don't like but can't change?
7. What methods for changing people's motivations have you seen which are ineffective?
8. What methods for changing people's motivations have you seen be effective?

At this point I would then move into a more open conversation about experiences and thoughts the interviewee would like to share.

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