

DIVERSITY OF TACTICS; The symbiosis of mutual aid, community care, and policy

DIVERSITY OF TACTICS disruptive or [defensive](#) purposes, stepping beyond the limits of [nonviolent resistance](#), but also stopping short of total militarization.^{[1][2]} It also refers to the theory which asserts this to be the most effective strategy of [civil disobedience](#) for social change.^[3] Diversity of tactics may promote [nonviolent tactics](#), or armed resistance, or a range of methods in between, depending on the level of repression the political movement is facing. It sometimes claims to advocate for "forms of resistance that maximize respect for life".^[4]

The first articulation of this concept was delivered by Malcom X in the 1960s, where in a speech he delivered called "The Black Revolution," he said,

"Our people have made the mistake of confusing the methods with the objectives. As long as we agree on objectives, we should never fall out with each other just because we believe in different methods or tactics or strategy to reach a common goal."

I'm here to talk to you today about this ethos of solidarity, and how it's been applied in my own experiences in organizing. This is in hopes that we, as a movement of sex workers, survivors, and allies, can further improve our avenues of accessibility, and thereby grow our community to accommodate a spectrum of abilities, capacities, and nuances within our ideologies and how they overlap, even when they don't align 100 per cent.

When I was radicalized during the occupy movement in 2012, I had several experiences in which I felt this expectation to put myself at risk "for the cause", or to engage in forms of resistance that didn't feel good for me. I learned then what my boundaries around action are, the hard way. I also saw a lot of internal conflict over nuanced differences of methodology and contending ideas of what the "right way" to move through political tension was. When this happens, we lose access to full spectrum strategy. We lose access to potential ideas and creative means we may not have considered before. In that time, we were a group of people all impacted by existing at the losing side of capitalism; this is a common walk of life, with lots of different identities shouldering the same problem. There could have been a robust and multifaceted, sustainable movement born from that time, but our community wasn't ready to move beyond polarization. It can't not feel to some then, that our peers are pushing an agenda, or care little for the impacts of what they promote in resistance. This kind of hardlining can be dangerous, as it can be digested as a feeling of coercion, or even bullying. It can send a message like "you do it our way, or you aren't allowed to participate", and plainly speaking, it's poor consent practice.

An extension of practicing mindful consent is to be absolutely clear about what you're asking of our peers, and to accept when their capacity does not meet with our requests. The facts were then, that not everyone can be arrested - or could sacrifice days long shifts in keeping our encampment safe from the police. Some people were led into

interactions with Seattle PD that they were not prepared for, or further supported through. I took those experiences with me.

I believe deeply in the importance of a multi-pronged approach to resistance, or social change if you will. The journey our collective has been on thus far demonstrates its utility. Beyond the fact that its resource consequences can be observed (people being fed, remaining housed, policies and legislative relationships are forged in good faith and trust.) This approach gives people a chance to participate in a spectrum of ways.

The Ishtar Collective, re-introduced methods of intersectional organizing like this through absolute necessity. In 2020, when we were founded, our mission was initially to be a part of the conversation regarding a policy that was introduced to decriminalize sex work. Of course, when COVID-19 made landfall in the United States, universally priorities shifted. For us, as sex workers and organizers in Vermont, this shift was one away from policy, and toward urgent community action to support sex workers and other underserved community members.

Mutual aid became our primary focus during the pandemic, and it took shape in the way of grassroots fundraising to allocate rental assistance to sex workers who were written out of the stimulus program. More than money, though, families needed to be fed too. Farms all over Vermont were forced to adjust their expectations and distribution of produce. We saw an opportunity, then, to collaborate with those farmers to glean nutritious food from their stores and get that resource out to twenty households over the first six months of this project.

The echo chamber of this shift is still evolving in organization in ways we could never have anticipated. Nearly four years later, we have established a food justice committee that runs a garden designed for the sole purpose of getting nutritious food out to our neighbors who may otherwise struggle to afford organic fruits and vegetables.

So, where did our policy efforts go? That never stopped either. In 2021, we pushed our first piece of policy; a good samaritan bill protecting sex workers from arrest should they be witness to, or victim of, a violent crime during an act of sex work. The bill passed with sweeping support from our elected officials. Happily, I report that every year that we have been active, we have managed a legislative victory so far. While that might not always be the case, I can tell you now that a big factor in our success is that our elected officials don't just see our advocates and membership in the state house. They see us constructing community fridges, growing food for neighbors, participating in community care beyond the silo of our sex worker circle.

Beyond adaptability, why is this way of doing things so important? How is this garden/policy split demonstrative of supporting diversity of tactics? Firstly, not everyone is in a place to be out as a sex worker, and policy work requires

this risk be taken. Coming out as a sex worker in your community, and to your legislative body, is something that's really hard to take back, it's just not a risk that everybody in our circles can take. The dangers are beyond physical harm; the echo chamber can create housing barriers, put custody of your kids at risk, and hurt chances of outside employment, even beyond the risk of legal ramifications. If you can't be in the state house, or if that method of organizing doesn't align with you, there should always be space made for alternative means. Again, what I learned in Seattle was that people exist on a spectrum of ability, capacity, trauma, experience, and availability. Creating robust community resistance has to be an act of trust in our common ground, and must be rooted in compromise, flexibility.

Not everybody has access to the same information or social resources to get them into perfect alignment with you, and that doesn't make anybody less worthy of support. Moreover, in resistance, we are always learning and unlearning. What felt just ten years ago, what worked and what I was willing to do has changed dramatically, and that's ok. What's important is that we are in solidarity for a common cause.

Supporting multiple avenues of activation in your work can make people feel more ready, and welcome to show up on their terms. This doesn't at all have to take shape the way we do things in Vermont. It might make more sense to focus on harm reduction, or peer support, clothing and resource drives, even creating community space. Give your neighbors a sense that the big picture matters to you within your capacity. Give your peers support in forging their own avenues of resistance, and collaborating with others honoring each other's boundaries of activity.

Simply put, this makes the thing more sustainable, it gets more done, and it's a lot more enjoyable for everyone involved.



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