

# Tactics and Tools

## Third World Women's Alliance

In 1972 members of the Third World Women's Alliance were attacked in a classic case of agent-baiting. Agent-baiting, as opposed to serious efforts to identify real police agents, is the tactic of confusing people with wild and unsubstantiated charges of police connections. Its purpose is to gain personal power or to discount political opponents and issues.

In the Alliance's case, a member of another organization falsely accused women in the group of being government agents after they had rejected his sexual advances. The accusations were presented without documentation and were made privately to friends and co-workers of the women. A "Super Spy" list included the names of the women's husbands or friends in other third world organizations, including some former members of his own organization. The names were changed depending on to whom the list was shown.

In the atmosphere of confusion and fear generated by these tactics, it took several months before the Alliance members and the others accused were able to figure out what was going on and demand that the other organization "substantiate the allegations" and "discuss the chauvinistic and counter-revolutionary behavior of a leading cadre." Instead of criticizing him, the members of his organization attempted to support his accusations saying it needed three weeks to prepare the case. This was rejected. The groups said that evidence should be gathered *before* accusations are made and decided it was necessary to inform the rest of the movement about what was going on.

The Alliance published an editorial in its newspaper *Triple Jeopardy* (Sept.-Oct. 1972) analyzing how the situation had reached the proportions it had. It developed an incisive critique of some of the political patterns and problems out of which the crisis grew. At the time the editorial was written, the problem of agents, opportunists, and fools had scarcely begun to be analyzed by the rest of the women's liberation movement. This critique was instrumental in resolving the particular conflict it addressed and also has wider relevance for all revolutionary movements. Following are excerpts:

Ever since its inception, the movement has been plagued by three elements: Agents, Opportunists, and Fools. In many ways we have been ineffective in our attempts to fight back. We might become more effective if we understood better the different tactics and tools that agents and opportunists use and the role that fools play in allowing them to function . . .

Agents are the most dangerous divisive force in the movement for their actions are premeditated and their role is to destroy organizations and people who are struggling for change. The experiences of the Panthers, the Viet Vets Against the War, the Harrisburg Case, and others attest to the widespread and destructive influence of agents in the movement. Because of this we often tend to become increasingly paranoid about the people around us and whether to trust them. The word "agent" is used loosely when referring to a person whose behavior we may find strange or whose political concepts are not fully understood. This has often led to good people turning against good people, splits, and sometimes the loss of many progressive and would-be progressive brothers and sisters. Agents often play a key role in creating an agent scare to turn good people against their comrades and to foment infighting.

Nevertheless, we must also turn our attention to the role that opportunists and fools play in allowing the agents to succeed in their dirty work.

We are a people that are considered the underdog in this society. Black and Puerto Rican people have not had a history of 'making it' in America. We have not been able to have a third world President of the U.S., nor a Secretary of State, nor Chairman of the Board, etc. Our heroes have often been the dude on the corner, the hustler, the pimp, etc. In order to become 'somebody' in america, the gang thing was the in-thing. Own a block, put your name on subways, kick ass, prove you're a man, etc.

While the movement has attracted some of the best elements of our communities who are dedicated, selfless individuals seriously working at becoming new human beings and changing the world, some of us still wanting to be "somebody" have found the movement to be a vehicle that allows us to carry through these desires. These are the opportunists. These people become politically involved in order to become KNOWN, to develop contacts, to sub-

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jugate their fellow comrades to their overwhelming charm, while in reality using them and the movement.

They are sometimes so caught up in establishing and maintaining their reputation that the meaning of struggle fully escapes them. They have no respect for collective leadership and are prone to ordering people about like a Nazi general. Opportunists are out to control, manipulate and obtain revolutionary glory. Now, instead of becoming the President, they seek to become Malcolm X, or Che Guevara without the work that is involved in changing themselves. They do not sit well with criticism, although they may pretend to and give lip service to the concept of criticism and self-criticism, but in practice they often respond either negatively or violently . . . Rather than listening and trying to see if there is any substance to the criticism, they begin to have hostile feelings toward the person who raises questions about their behavior or beliefs. They don't regard the person giving the criticism as a comrade trying to help them develop, but rather as an enemy and sometimes a pig—depending on how much they feel threatened. This can well be understood because of their dishonesty, both with themselves and with their comrades.

The opportunist has a tremendous ego and is always ready for action though they often fail to complete assigned tasks. In their personal relations they are often abusive to their lovers, dishonest, manipulative. They use everyone and sometimes destroy those whom they profess to love, be it a woman, child, friend or comrade who believed in them because they thought that the person was honest, sincere; in a word, principled. . . .

The third element playing a key role in the situation is that of the fool. We use the word fool to describe the position and role one plays when manipulated by the enemy. It is something that at one point or another most of us have experienced. It is easy to come down on those that are in the situation and consider them as niggers, stupid, foolish, low level political cripples, etc. However, that would be an elitist attitude. We must instead point out how their own contradictions aided the enemy, whether he be an agent or an opportunist, and give advice from our own experiences.

Several members in all the organizations involved have been playing the role of the fool. When M. showed his "Super Spy" list to them, they accepted it as fact. Others who asked for evidence were told that it would be forthcoming, which it never was. There are, of course, those who demanded proof and criticized him for making unsubstantiated statements, and they were beaten up for their efforts. Still others allowed the poisons, suspicion, and distrust to overwhelm them and they became paralyzed.

It is very important to examine and understand the reasons individuals become involved in situations where they have been used and set up. We sometimes find people who are new to the movement to be very impressed by leadership, by individuals with contacts, particular skills, or past move-

ment experiences. Too often this comes without an evaluation based on analysis and investigation, and is prevalent in people with a lack of experience.

Many of the women in the Third World Women's Alliance have had little involvement in the movement until they join us. It is not an accident. One of our main purposes is to organize and bring into the struggle those women who are not yet involved. Some don't understand the dangers of liberalism and talking behind closed doors and not bringing things into the open. In addition, many did not feel they wanted to cause any waves and so did not talk about M.'s sexist behavior towards them.

Within his organization itself, many of the cadres have taken on the role of the fool. Rather than entering into a serious dialogue about the blatant counter-revolutionary behavior of M., they make excuses or refuse to discuss it. One of the worst traits of liberalism occurs when cadres don't criticize a fellow comrade just because he is a member of that organization, or they have known him or her for a long period of time. They don't evaluate the situation on its merits, but rather accept the view of the opportunist.

The fool is usually very committed and is persuaded to take actions and positions in the name of revolution and principles. The fool is often promoted to high positions and given important roles which help to build his or her loyalty to the agent or opportunist and at the same time is placed in a position to accomplish the subjective goals of the enemy.

The opportunist often focuses on people that have influence among other people and attempts to gain their confidence. Through the fools, the opportunist can then control and/or manipulate others in an organization . . . This can sometimes cause an entire organization to take erroneous positions. This possibility is reduced if the organization engages in honest and profound criticism and self-criticism, however.

We must at this point understand that one need not be an agent in order to do the work of an agent. And if the end result is the same, then the opportunist and the agent must then be treated the same. Our aim is a better society; anyone who stifles or in some way retards our advance should be exposed and condemned.

As members of revolutionary organizations we repudiate the allegations made and continue to demand that either these charges be documented or repudiated. We also repudiate anyone who spreads malicious rumors without backing them up and who deals in a sexist way with sisters, claiming they are agents after they refuse to go to bed with him. We repudiate anyone who attempts to isolate people through physical violence and mental intimidation and resorts to violence against those who confront him with his contradictions. The people's court is in session. We are still prepared to meet to resolve this serious situation.