Lake Effect Collective
Getting Organized
3-July-2025

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our organization takes as a basic premise that everyone involved has other commitments: work, family, other parts of their social and political lives, etc. We set our timelines and expectations relative to this knowledge and do not, under any circumstances, leverage shame if someone has another event or obligation that takes priority over a meeting or an action.

It is entirely understandable that in the face of extreme crises, people seek certainty and direction from rigid groups purporting to have found one or another skeleton key to the present moment. For our part, we've found this certainty to be convenient, self-confirming, and ultimately fleeting. We derive our own sense of political certainty from our ability, as a group, to seriously evaluate our activity as it fits into ongoing struggles at the national and international scale.

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The first type is internal discipline. This is a shared sense of confidence and focus which flows from the member's trust in themselves to do what they've promised to do, out of a recognition of the stakes of their activity. A member of the group can rely on other people, and when they pick up a task, the rest of the group relies on them to follow through. This is a working relationship that we first experimented with as a set of affinity groups and direct action crews, and we've found scaling it up helpful and relatively painless. It informs the rest of our group life.

The second is external discipline, which seeks out an external body or authority one can subordinate oneself to and be disciplined by. This is common in all sorts of contexts: from simple cases in authoritarian micro-sects, where members are expected to repeatedly subordinate their lives to the aims of the dwindling collective, to more complex ones in the student movements, where activity for its own sake typically flows from deep, fervent feelings of urgency and personal insignificance, and leads activists to overextend and exhaust their resources until they burn out. Like before, these rely on senses of mutual obligation, but so long as one leaves themselves out of that relation, these disciplining situations tend to decrease participants' ability to develop as people and act as equal members of the group.

Many of us have come out of experiments with formal organizations that crumbled quickly because of a lack of set expectations about logistical fine points, regular activity, and obligation to the project. These projects have fallen apart not because people don't care enough about revolution, but instead because participants' priorities and everyday needs weren't clearly stated, and so instead of being able to voice their concerns or have other people cover for their obligations, too-busy comrades just dropped out. This sort of "selection process" doesn't produce a more dedicated core of radicals; it produces crews full of people who can't say no. By contrast,

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camp. But sustained revolutionary struggle requires bonds of trust that cannot be sustained by deception. Similarly, fully informed comrades work together better than ones who are subject to rigid hierarchies of need-to-know information sharing.

At the heart of this is a dynamic, social conception of politics. Politics is composed of social relations, and political projects are only as healthy as the ethics animating those relations. Deception, manipulation, and secrecy breed interpersonal and political resentment, which is fatal to any political grouping, no matter how many formal structures one establishes to ward off its consequences. We treat each other with honesty and respect.

Should political life make us miserable?

As we moved from a set of affinity groups into a larger, named organization, we also developed a few subjective qualities that lent themselves to maintaining the collective and its political projects. Instead of a total distinction between the affinity that brought us together and work-style formality, the "discipline" that members of the group exhibit is still based on interpersonal obligation to the rest of the group, and on loyalty to our shared political project. But the way we relate to each other qua political work is qualitatively different than the way we relate as friends, and it lets us evaluate conflicts and tensions by reference to the reason we're all working together – the medium-term goals of the group and our shared desire to avert impending, planetary catastrophe – instead of hashing them out according to who's friends with whom, who's been a member of the group the longest, or any other shallow claims of seniority. It might be helpful to distinguish between two types of discipline, one of which we strive for and the other of which we don't.

than others. Instead of letting this range of experiences solidify into a rote technical division of labor, we try to de-specialize the skills and interpersonal connections we have. By avoiding deference to older or more experienced members, and likewise avoiding formalized "mentorship" processes, we've managed to bring members into political tasks and theoretical discussions more quickly and confidently than otherwise.

Why aim for transparency?

The internal structure of the Lake Effect Collective is completely transparent to the people who are in it. We also strive to be as legible as possible to people engaged in struggles with us, as well as potential comrades. We understand the real security culture calculations animating questions of visibility, and balance these considerations with our conviction that politics is based on transparent, honest relationships between human beings. We are not a primarily aboveground or belowground organization as a matter of principle, but do our best to link these two "modes" of political work, balancing questions of opacity with our desire to be approachable and visible as a collection of human beings.

We have found that mutual trust, honesty, and transparency are crucial ingredients of organizing projects. In the political work that we do – and as much as necessary otherwise – we don't conceal things from one another, and our orientation to mass struggle means that we don't try to trick people into acting in ways congruent with our strategic and revolutionary outlook. Revolutionary measures will be implemented consciously by millions of people, and they will be political from the outset or they won't be implemented at all. People can be tricked in individual cases, such as a rumor spread in 2011 that Radiohead was playing Occupy Wall Street, which resulted in thousands of New Yorkers swarming the

Our group is a conscious experiment at bridging our earlier affinity-based organizing with a named, semi-structured organization. This has attracted questions from both intentionally-opaque affinity groups and people more at home in the world of public-facing activism. We've collectively authored this piece to clarify how we work together and why.

And of course, we aren't the only ones experimenting with more formal organization. Plenty of crews are doing cool, committed work where they live. Having been a conscious group for only about a year, we are still experimenting with our practices of working, reading, analyzing, and discussing together. We believe these are processes that cannot be perfected in advance, but rather must be constantly tested and reworked as demanded by practice. And as the political and economic landscape shifts and our group matures, there will likely be further changes to our internal organization.

The principles we've laid out below help orient us in this process, but so does discussion with and inspiration from other groups across the spectrum of formality. From the practical aspects of tool and skill-sharing, to methods of assessing ongoing projects and different modes of studying and writing together, we hope to learn from others what has worked for them, and what hasn't. In addition to clarifying who we are and how we work together, we're hopeful that this document contributes to those discussions.

Why exist?

The Lake Effect Collective emerged as a means to navigate between two bad choices. The first was remaining at the level of overlapping affinity groups, which make up the base layer of radical, politicized people. The affinity group is useful for moving together, especially for direct actions and higher-stakes street situations. However, since it relies on relations of affin-

ity between individuals, it constantly risks breakdown via interpersonal conflict, limits our continuity between artificially-separated social movement campaigns, and rarely allows the development of strategic thinking or larger-scale activity. The second option was folding ourselves into the upper layer of the movement: large, recruitment-oriented organizations, which may facilitate larger-scale action but tend to prioritize those organizations' self-perpetuation and expansion over their stated loyalties to collective emancipation. (As a result, we found their strategic lines unclear and unhelpful, as successes and failures in "intermediate struggles" pile up and the revolutionary goal appears no closer.) As we have moved into a place somewhere between these two poles, we have sought to avoid excessive informality and the tyranny of structurelessness, while orienting to and prioritizing the autonomous character of mass struggle.

Some of our members have spent time as part of named, formal organizations that aimed to address some of the same problems we do. But they found these formal organizations, which were defined by shared doctrines and commitments to ideas and internal processes, often ended up treading water without defining concrete tasks beyond their own perpetuation, spiraling into conflict over their abstract points of contention, or breaking apart once realizing their unity rested merely on such abstract points.

By contrast, our group emerged out of a few interlocked affinity groups with working relationships. We have privileged a working political unity achieved in practice over ideological "political" unity, which all too often leaves participants unsure where to start acting; this is a common feature of student and activist movements, where hyper-specific ideological affiliation and aimless activity for its own sake are two sides of the same coin. Practical activities have shaped how we reflect on things we've done, propose future projects, consider long-term strategies, and conduct actions. Even the choice to formalize our relations was itself the result of practical considerations, as

our activity hit walls. These tools and techniques were devised when they proved to be necessary, not decided on in advance.

What is our group life like?

Our theoretical discussions sprout from and orient towards the practical work we do. At the beginning of every meeting, we discuss a short reading picked by a different member every two weeks. These discussions are typically tailored to our activity and the way we understand ongoing struggles. They are not intended to establish political lines or a shared worldview among members, which would arbitrarily end discussions by majority vote or appeals to expertise. We take a major failure of the sixties' formal organizations to have been their attempts to construct shared worldviews at odds with their members' critical faculties.

We do bring our ideological backgrounds with us to meetings and discussions, but rather than letting dead traditions dictate our relations to one another, we privilege theoretical debate and practical experimentation. These debates aim to develop and maintain tactical and strategic unity – regarding the methods we employ, their purposes, and the reasons behind them–rather than establishing ideological unity around a common line within the group. In our experience, this emphasis on epistemic humility and practical experimentation prepares us for more creative and prompt responses to a rapidly changing situation than other groups whose ideological tightness restricts their political imagination.

Some members of the collective have been involved in radical social movements for over a decade, while others were politicized by the George Floyd Uprising or the last year of the Palestine movement. As a result, some people are more experienced at doing movement-related work – painting banners, writing reportbacks, planning actions, leading chants, etc. –