

NOTES FOR IMPROVING LIBERTARIAN POLITICAL TACTICS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

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Richard R. Slomon

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Tactical considerations differ from "strategic" in dealing with organized actions involving relatively lower orders of: (1) personnel (2) time and (3) area. The "tactical" quality of an operation lies in its relative immediacy, localization and personalization. A tactical error is logically less significant in a protracted conflict than one of strategy or grand strategy. However, the repetition of tactical errors can result in a strategic loss.

Effective political tactics must not only maximize the efficiency of local operations but must fit into strategic considerations. A local tactician must never lose sight of strategic objectives i.e. local operations should wherever possible benefit and complement the rational political objectives of the Party.

The effectiveness of local political tactics depends on the thoroughness of prior preparation and the degree of systematic organization. Preparation involves the thorough analysis of local conditions (e.g. evaluation of political issues, demographic conditions, power networks, cultural attitudes, etc.) and the mobilization of local forces. Organization includes the prioritization of tasks and objectives (temporal and spatial) the assignment of tasks, establishing levels of accountability in delegating tasks, methods of relief, contingency planning and selecting follow-up actions.

Preparation requires that all active personnel be aware of objectives and the importance of carrying out their assigned tasks within the prepared format. This requires time and effort. The leaders of local tactical units must be firm even if it disenchant some who are not truly serious about their involvement. A serious participant is one who punctually performs tasks for which he or she has volunteered. Tactical operations require small highly dedicated groups who can maneuver larger more nebulous groups. The necessity for this will become more evident in the discussion of actual tactics.

The best way to create these core groups is to create intense relationships which enter their daily lives. You want your core infrastructure to eat, breath and sleep the Party. This goes especially for local units. If at all possible they should be meeting at least once a week. And in order to bolster morale as well as designating accountability and a spirit of competition in performance they should be given names. For instance, the Queen Anne group could be called the Toni Nathan Brigade of the 36th District.

Preparation should involve the distribution of political maps and political census materials to each tactical group leader. Within each district, the local group should perform informal study on political and economic conditions in their area leading to summary reports to the state organization. At least one person should be designated to read local papers to watch for local conflicts advantageous to the Party. Local tactical groups should visit so-called community group meetings and open hearings. Whenever possible, local tactical group members should seek election to these bodies.

Among the types of advanced preparation for tactical level operations include the predefinition of local "ideal types". This concept, borrowed from the famous German sociologist Max Weber, involves the identification of key social, economic and cultural elements of a certain type of personality. In a simplified form it can be used to describe various "types" which will be encountered in a particular area. Quick sketches can be distributed to the members of the tactical unit permitting them to practice ready replies to particular types of objectives, as well as providing the field worker with rapid insight into the particular condition of local people.

As an example, the retired elderly inhabitants can be "ideal typed" as to certain economic, political, social, psychological and physical concerns. The sketch would contain accurate references to events (in the neighborhood, region or nation) relevant to the youth of an elderly person. Facts on the drawbacks of social security, of Medicaid, Medicare, crime patterns against the elderly, the impact of taxes on retired persons would all be included.

Each tactical member would accumulate a notebook of ideal types to be reviewed and updated before making a foray into a particular area. This particular problem of ideal typing involves considerable help from the central 'brain trust' at the state level of organization.

By the very nature of this level of preparation the coherence and intensity of the local units should fall into place. The first step of preparation for tactical political action is getting your people involved. Political involvement requires the systematic displacement of other activities in the rank and file through new habits. Habits break down if they are not routinely reinforced.

Organization of local tactical units requires defining (1) what issues and organizations are most amenable to re-education and the formation of alliances; (2) the degree of importance of the district or area within the state plan (for instance should the local unit shift to the aid of another local unit); (3) criteria for objectives such as recruitment and influence. Once having established these general requirements for the tactical units, the local unit leader can set to the work of building party strength in the district. This must proceed as much as possible simultaneously on several levels and constantly whether elections are in process or not.

Surprise and indirectness of approach can be as useful in political action as in military strategy. Local tactics must continue year-round so as to produce surprise and indirectness.

Surprise can be achieved effectively by a small tactical group in many many ways and can produce exceedingly fruitful results over time. As an example, the city of Seattle Shoreline Master Plan is something generally disregarded except by bureaucrats and the people with an axe to grind. The City Council only expects to hear the regular pleas for special zoning dispensations by one group or another. It does not expect for example, that a half a dozen persons will speak one after another in defense of liberty and property rights, thus unleashing a virtual furor of repressed anger against the bureaucracy.

Such a tactic, however, requires careful planning and preparation as well as a follow-up. And for instance, the second hearing should be permeated with expectancy on both sides (including the media). What are those Libertarians going to say this time.

At each one of these meetings short position papers should be handed out to friendly elements in the crowd. Addresses and phone numbers of admirers should be recorded to be sent to the state organization. Media reporters should be given the straight libertarian line. All tactical group members should know and be able to express brief and clear explanations of the Libertarian creed. In other words -- get the message across.

For example, the answer to question "What is Libertarianism?" One could answer, "It is based on the principles of non-aggression and self-ownership. In other words, a human being by his very nature, must be left free to make his own choices as long as he doesn't employ force in dealing with others. We assert that property rights are absolutely basic to all other rights. As a consequence, the only legitimate function of a government is the protection of the right to life and property and not the confiscation of earnings through taxes and regulations. or meddling in the personal life of an individual."

The quality of indirectness is more complex to define. Local tactics, for example, should employ a great deal of leafletting and distributing position sheets. These should alternately attack the major parties and actions of local officials. But substantial effort should be devoted to the development of position sheets which educate the public without polemicizing. Give them the facts but in a short and readable form. Hand out position sheets on inflation on Saturday to grocery shoppers. Hand out sheets to people waiting on gas rationing lines about the government involvement in the energy crisis. They can read while they wait.

This must be done consistently and in a friendly way. Position sheets should be regularly placed in laundromats and apartment lobbies. The libertarian position on victimless crimes should be placed in local youth centers, and places frequented by students.

There are, however, special rules in the factors which must be fastidiously observed. Don't overdo it! Move around the district in a one month cycle. Remember that these people can only digest a little at a time. Try to make friends with "Local characters" and after a time get them to volunteer to help a little. But do something every week even if it is only a few hours of leafletting.

This process is only the beginning. It is only the "feeling out" of the enemies defenses. The tactical unit leader should always remember that every move facilitates the next move. He or she should always be reminding the other members of the unit that their efforts are producing an initially slow chain reaction which eventually should catch their opponents by surprise!

Every effort should be made to enlist new volunteers. Residents in the area should be given responsibility for a street or apartment. The tactical unit should drop-off sheets and position papers for distribution. These people should be phoned periodically to inquire as to their progress.

Leafletting should also be directed at the residential districts. The tactical unit should not concentrate in one place but hit key nodes and move quickly to some other area. However in elections, the entire district should be covered.

After a period of introducing the area to libertarian concepts, the unit should go doorbelling to find their "silent supporters". Any individual who is friendly should be revisited for a casual discussion. List of references should be left with him. In doing this, the most appropriate person in the unit should be assigned to that prospect. For instance send older and well-dressed persons to more well-to-do neighborhoods. As often as possible, supporters in an area should be brought together at coffee hours in the home of a tactical unit member. It is very important that silent supporters be given the opportunity to meet others of their own kind. New friendships could well replace less positive relationships.

Another set of tactics involves manipulation of local media such as newspapers and radio stations. Each tactical unit should develop skills in writing letters to the editor. The basic rules in writing these are brevity, clarity and facts. Paragraphs should be short. Sentences should be simple and the topic should proceed from particular fact of local significance to a general condition. Four or five brief paragraphs is ideal. Remember that the editor is often looking for the best "representative sample". Give him the best and always strike at the core of the issue -- don't waste space and time for trivia.

An efficient way of saving time and getting into local papers is to have a central writer's pool for the state authoring letters which are modified by the local unit to be sent to local papers.

Special interviews on local stations and papers should be sought by the tactical group. Reporters are always looking for stories. If each tactical unit could practice these methods they would gain exposure at all levels. This would permit the state organization to operate with much greater facility.

The preceding sections can be outlined in a sequence of stages much like a system of ecological succession or a guerrilla war. The first stage involves preparation and reconnaissance. This first includes recruiting and organizing the tactical unit, second the study of its operations area, and third selection of tactical objectives. Once this has been done the unit is ready for its second stage.

The second stage involves penetration of the area. This includes: (1) influence and use of media systems; (2) participating in local quasi-governing groups to convert or demoralize contending activists; (3) creating a new ambiance in the area with Party literature and face-to-face reeducation.

The third stage is one of consolidating a local infrastructure. This requires the crucial steps of (1) finding and creating friends; (2) activating these individuals in a graduated manner; (3) linking them together in a tough and durable network. This is the toughest and most important stage.

The fourth stage requires mobilization of the local network for large scale actions such as statewide and national elections.

Aside from "conventional" political tactics there are "exotic" tactics which can be used in concert to boost morale in the ranks and to grab the initiative. Exotic tactics are more speculative and riskier than conventional tactics (described above) but the returns can be great.

Picketing is a primary tactic. However, the objective of attack must be carefully selected. Likely targets include: the Internal Revenue Service, welfare officer, new highway construction projects, unpopular eminent domain cases; and any other site associated with government coercion.

The picketing should be well equipped with signs and literature. Members of tactical units involved should psychologically and physically be prepared for the worst. A definite time of involvement should be planned prior to the action. In some cases, picketing could become open-ended and indefinite. This will not be advantageous.

Two situations should generally be avoided in this tactic: (1) Muscling-in on some other group's conflict; and (2) failure to connect (in the "eye" of the media) the parochial issue with the general principle.

Although picketing can be a purely local tactic it can be coordinated for greatest effect on state or even nationwide basis. For example, picketing of welfare office in Seattle on Monday could be followed by the same action in Los Angeles on Tuesday, and New York on Wednesday. Every attempt should be made to arouse the ire of oppressed taxpayers against the moochers and bureaucrats. Give the television media a scene of a demonstration in heated debate with a welfare worker. This kind of tactic begins verging on the strategic in terms of significance.

Exotic tactics should aim at both gut-level issues such as wasteful expenditures, bureaucratic bungling, property rights but it should also take on "cerebral" issues such as opposition to public parks and to the psychological commitment law.

Counterpicketing against state employee strikes could be a master-stroke setting off shock waves perhaps of international scope. This should be organized as soon as feasible.