

Principles of Psywar

By Jay Taber

With the advent of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the world indigenous resurgence will require the linking of national, regional, and local movement resources through a process of dialogue and integration. The involvement of moral authorities and organizations will help to assure the proper movement emphasis on moral sanction central to constructing new relationships between nations and states. But moral sanction alone is insufficient to constrain reactionary political violence and official repression. That will require continuous research, analysis, and investigation -- the civil society equivalent of wartime intelligence operations — in order to weather the psychological warfare associated with the disease of dominion.

Psychological warfare, according to Paul Linebarger of the School of Advanced International Studies, is a continuous process not controlled by laws, usages, and customs of war — covert, often disguised as the voice of institutions and media — a non-violent persuasion waged before, during, and after war.

Most countries, notes Linebarger, suffer from ideological confusion—an instability of basic beliefs. “In states anxious to promote a fixed mentality, the entire population lives under conditions approximating the psychological side of war. Allegiance in war is a matter of ideology, not of opinion.” Coordinated propaganda machines, he observes, include psywar, public relations, general news, and public education. “Psywar,” he warns, “has in private media facilities, in an open society, a constantly refreshed source of new material that, when selectively censored, can prevent non-governmental materials from circulating.”

As Kalle Lasn, publisher of Adbusters Magazine said when interviewed in the July 2001 issue of *The Sun*, “It’s impossible to live a free authentic life in America today ... Our emotions, personalities, and core values have become programmed.” Lasn, a former advertising executive for thirty years, understands the power of propaganda as advertising. He also understands the keys to undermining this corrupting influence—persistent ridicule, and appeals to conscience.

Antonio Gramsci, writing in Prison Notebooks, observes that, “Civil society operates without ‘sanctions’ or compulsory ‘obligations’, but nevertheless exerts a collective pressure and obtains objective results in the form of an evolution of customs, ways of thinking and acting, and morality. The eclipse of a way of living and thinking cannot take place without a crisis.” Civil society today, I would argue, exists in a perpetual state of crisis — some fabricated and some real — that, with the advent of alternative media, desktop publishing, and Internet communication, offers an unprecedented opportunity to begin this eclipse.

As Gramsci observed from prison in 1930s Fascist Italy, “If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer leading but only dominant, exercising coercive force alone, this means the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies and

no longer believe what they used to... [thus] the exercise of force to prevent new ideologies from imposing themselves leads to skepticism and a new arrangement—a new culture.” If the world indigenous movement is to succeed in creating a new culture based on mutual respect, the ways of thinking of the old culture must be strategically challenged.

In doing graduate research for the thesis included in my second book, I developed a curricular proposal that incorporated the study of psychological warfare as a key component of effective social activism:

<http://skookumgeoduck.blogspot.com/2005/05/communication-for-change.html>

The more I observe discussion online about social conflict now taking place on the Internet and public airwaves, the more I realize how widespread and entrenched the misunderstanding of the nature of this conflict is, and in turn how important it is for those engaged in this war of ideas to acquaint themselves with at least the basic principles if not tactics of psywar. For those unable to access the classic texts on this topic -- *Psychological Warfare* by Paul Linebarger, and *The Science of Coercion* by Christopher Simpson -- I'll try to recall them here.

For starters, there are two things to always keep in mind: the target audience, and the purpose of the message. In a theater of war -- physical or psychological -- there are combatants and non-combatants and at least two sides, as well as many interests. In communicating social transformation, psywar will be employed at different times and in different ways depending on the audience targeted and what the message transmitter is attempting to affect.

In recruiting the uninvolved or uncommitted, the message might convey an urgent threat, a righteous cause, a juicy opportunity, or a chance for revenge. In retaining the involved, a message would likely include an appeal to pride and expectations of victory. In undermining the resolve of the enemy, messages generally try to create doubts about all the above.

One area often overlooked by novices to psychological warfare, however, is the use of messages crafted and delivered for the purpose of preventing the enemy from effectively mobilizing audiences potentially supportive of its views, goals, and objectives. These strategically-developed messages -- sometimes overt, sometimes covert -- are those most commonly associated with gray and black ops, white being forthright, gray misleading, and black counterfeit.

Understanding these techniques of mass communication -- deployed in abundance in politics and advertising today -- is essential for those who care about where the world is heading, even if in the end they decide to avoid the field of social conflict themselves. Once educated on the topic, they can at least refrain from unwittingly undermining those with whom they agree. Manuel Castells, in *Communication, Power and Counter-power in the Network Society*, has a lot more to say on this.

<http://ijoc.org/ojs/index.php/ijoc/article/view/46/35>

The first principle of psywar is never repeat the talking points of your enemy. The second principle is to deny them a platform to misinform.

Jay Taber -- recipient of the *Defender of Democracy* award -- is an author, columnist, and associate editor of *Fourth World Journal*.
<http://www.lulu.com/spartacus>