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BUILD YOUR OWN SOLIDARITY NETWORK

*A guide to building a successful solidarity network along the lines of the
Seattle Solidarity Network, written by SeaSol organizers.*



Do you have a favourite anecdote or memory related to the organisation?

It's been amusing to see bosses' anguish when things don't go their way. They are often quite disappointed when a quick call to the police doesn't result in our disappearance, since we are doing nothing illegal. I like seeing the look of confusion and panic when a large group of people suddenly invades their private space. One particularly funny memory is being threatened with a baseball bat by a hotel owner's minion, who then decided to call the police on us. He ended up admitting intent to assault with a deadly weapon to the police....

What have you learned from your experiences in the group?

Many things. I know that in any future job I would be far more confident in fighting back against management. I feel more able to organise at work, when I wouldn't really have known where to start before. It has been very satisfying to apply anarchist ideas of direct action and solidarity and see them work effectively. I've learnt how to view things tactically and strategically. I've learnt how to investigate and research targets, how to communicate better and build links with people. I've tasted collective power. I think it's been quite an empowering experience for many of us in SeaSol, and I hope it continues....

What lessons do you think other workers can take from your group?

That even in these times of defeat and economic depression it's still quite feasible to fight back and win. That anarchist ideas work in real life. That collective direct action around small issues is an effective starting point for further struggle....

INTRODUCTION

In which we describe this article's intended purpose and audience.

The Seattle Solidarity Network (or "SeaSol" for short) is a small but growing workers' and tenants' mutual support organization that fights for specific demands using collective direct action. Founded in late 2007 by members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), SeaSol is directly democratic, is all-volunteer, has no central authority, and has no regular source of funding except small individual donations. We have successfully defeated a wide variety of employer and landlord abuses, including wage theft, slumlord neglect, deposit theft, outrageous fees, and predatory lawsuits.

We've gotten a lot of inquiries in the past several months from folks in other cities wanting to start something like SeaSol where they live. Our mission in this article is to describe, for the benefit of those trying to build something similar, our experience of what it took to get SeaSol started and to keep it growing.

Please note: we are writing as individuals, and not in the name of the organization.

The newest joint project is with IWSJ, a student and worker group at the University of Washington centered around a rank and file group of janitors. They are interested in doing SeaSol-type actions within the low-paid immigrant communities they have good links with, and we are interested in learning about workplace groups from them. We'll see how that develops.

We are trying to support and encourage the formation of solidarity networks around the world, such as the Olympia, Tacoma, and Glasgow Solidarity Networks. We are offering support and training to new groups whenever we can. We have also been in contact with workers' centres, which have some similarities to SeaSol, such as the Lansing Workers Center, and are interested in learning more about the advantages and differences with this kind of organising.

Personally, I've been trying to convince anarchist groups and individuals of the usefulness of setting up solidarity networks....

How would you respond to criticisms that these small victories are all well and good, but they are not a model for creating social change faced as we are with an onslaught on jobs, housing, public services, etc across the world?

As you have pointed out the struggles are rather small scale, involving an issue that only affects a single individual or family, or a small group of workers or tenants, who have often left their old job or rental situation. This is the main limitation of our current organising method. However we don't see this as a huge obstacle because we aren't intending to limit ourselves to just these small fights forever. Instead we view them as first steps to more ambitious projects. As we build up experience, confidence, membership, a support base, contacts, reputation and so on, we intend to branch out into other forms of organisation, such as helping set up and assisting tenants' and workplace groups—the first steps to do so are already underway. We are committed to a flexible, experimental approach. I view these small fights as a training ground for class struggle organising, from which we can progress to bigger, more collective, more prolonged projects. They aren't a model for social change as such but they contain a key ingredient required for large scale social change—direct action by the people facing a problem themselves.

SeaSol is in some sense an adaptation to modern conditions of high turnover and small workplaces— as one member has said we "organise the

P REREQUISITES

In which we explain the basic things we needed in order to be able to launch SeaSol.

People wanting to know how SeaSol got started often ask whether we had funding, whether we had an office, or whether we had extensive legal knowledge. We had none of these things, and we didn't need them. However, there were a few basic things that we absolutely did need to have in order to make it work, and they are probably just as essential for anyone else out there who wants to build a solidarity network.

1---One or two solid organizers. Of all the essential elements, this one tends to be the most difficult to come by. Without it, any new solidarity network is doomed. Other activists may come and go, but there must be at least some who are extremely dedicated to the project, competent, self-organized, able to put a lot of time into the work, and planning on sticking with it for at least a couple of years. In SeaSol, it helped that some also had prior organizing experience.

2---The ability to round up at least 15-20 people. This one is obvious, but people who are new to organizing almost always overestimate how many people they can mobilize. Getting 15 people to an action usually requires getting about 25 people to tell you, "Yes, I will be there."

For the first SeaSol actions, before we had an established phone tree, we just had to try to mobilize among our friends, our friends' friends, IWW members, and people connected to other pre-existing organizations. We also sent emails to a few old lists that were left over from defunct radical projects from the early 2000's. Our first action invitation was the only exciting thing that had gone out on some of those lists for a very long time, and this probably contributed to what we then considered an excellent turnout, 23 people.

3---The ability to reach out and find workers and tenants who have conflicts with their bosses and landlords. SeaSol did this by putting up posters around bus stops. See the 'Starting Fights' section for more on this.

range of backgrounds. This seems to be happening as we gradually pick up people from the fights we've been involved in.

One problem we've noticed in workplace-related fights is that some employees, if for example they are faced with a picket outside the restaurant they work in, buy into the management's side of the story and resent our presence which results in reduced business and therefore lost tips for them. We've successfully started countering this by making a collection amongst the demonstrators to make up for the lost tips, and clearly explaining to workers that we are not against them, we are against their boss. We need to keep doing this, and start communicating more with workers before beginning a campaign.

When did things start to gain momentum/take off?

It took over four months since we first started putting posters up. Our first real fight was when we were contacted by some people living in the Greenlake Motel. This "motel" was really a pay by the week long term residence for people who couldn't pass the checks necessary to get higher quality, lower cost housing—because they had a criminal record or bad credit or housing history, or couldn't afford the usual first and last month's plus a damage deposit of rented housing. They had seen our poster and complained of terrible living conditions—mould, leaks, broken heating, etc. After some door knocking to gauge the situation some SeaSol members and tenants drew up a demand letter listing the repairs that needed to be made. We gathered a couple of dozen people and with one of the tenants (unfortunately the other tenants were too nervous about being evicted) we went to the landlords' more respectable hotel and delivered the demand letter to the perplexed receptionist.

A few days later the landlords went round each flat and made the necessary repairs, while warning the tenants not to talk to "those communists". This was our first significant success. This wasn't the end of the Greenlake Motel story though—a few months later, we were contacted again—the motel had been condemned by the Health Department. The tenants, since they were technically short term motel residents and therefore not entitled to the same legal protections as regular tenants, were facing immediate eviction. They were more willing to fight as a group this time, and won relocation assistance (three months' worth of rent each) to move to better places.

STARTING FIGHTS

In which we describe how we find people with employer or landlord conflicts and bring them into SeaSol campaigns.

Postering. From the start, our main way of finding new people with job or housing conflicts has been by putting up posters on telephone poles. We mostly post them in working class neighborhoods or in industrial areas where a lot of people work. The most effective places to stick them seem to be around high-traffic bus stops. Someone who's standing around waiting for a bus is more likely to take the time to read a poster than someone who's walking past.

We keep the content of our posters extremely simple and direct. Because we want to elicit fights that we can win with our current size and strength, our posters list specific problems that we think we can potentially deal with: "unpaid wages?" "stolen deposit?". If someone is currently facing one of these problems, these words are likely to catch their eye.

Postering is a 'passive' form of outreach, since we're leaving it up to the screwed-over worker or tenant to contact us and ask for our support, instead of us approaching them. We do this for a reason: people who have taken the initiative to contact us are more likely to be people who are prepared to play an active role in a campaign. Also the fact that they have approached us, and not the other way around, makes it easier for us to insist on some conditions in exchange for our support. For example, they'll have to be actively involved in their own fight, and they'll have to join the solidarity network and commit to coming out for others as well. That's our deal – take it or leave it.

Getting contacts via posters isn't easy. At the beginning of SeaSol, there were doubts about whether anyone would ever call us. We started by spending several weeks working on and arguing about text and design

How did it get started?

It got started because a small group of us, mostly IWW members and anarchists in Seattle, were frustrated with our current lack of activity. The Seattle IWW general membership branch was too small and lacking in resources to attempt to organise any workplaces—the best we could do would be offer training and support to any workers who approached us interested in unionising their workplace, something that happens only occasionally and hasn't yet progressed to an organising drive. My own perspective originated from frustration with symbolic and ineffectual anti-war and anti-globalisation protests and anarchist propaganda groups that had limited relevance to most people's lives, including my own.

SeaSol started from a mixture of notions such as trying to create a flying picket squad or a direct action casework group in the vein of OCAP. Some members had a minor experience with wage reclaiming, in an individual case where a friend had been hired for one day at a restaurant and then told she was no longer needed and would not be paid as it was a "training day"—by turning up at the restaurant as a large group, they forced the owner to pay her. Another member already had a website and email list for strike support news in Seattle, so we put it to a new use as well as taking its name.

At the beginning we did not have a clear idea of exactly what we would do but decided to focus on supporting workers and tenants in struggles, in ways where we could win immediate gains rather than getting bogged down in everlasting campaigns. Also in ways that would benefit ourselves if we ever got into a conflict with our own bosses or landlords. For that purpose we designed two posters: "Problems with your boss?" and "Problems with your landlord? Contact us." We put these posters up around Seattle, got a few phone calls, and that's how it started!

Why were more other more traditional organisations (e.g. trade unions) not appropriate?

We wanted to do it ourselves, not through some other organisation. Persuading some other group to take up this relatively unknown approach would have been a waste of time. It made sense to create SeaSol as a separate organisation from the IWW for various reasons—we would not be subject to secondary picketing laws, not all the initial people involved were IWW members, and it would allow us to be more flexible. The various bureaucratic NGOs and unions were too slow moving to take or

se that we will win their fight, but we give them a sense of the strategy behind our campaigns, and why it usually succeeds. We also briefly explain the other key things they need to understand about SeaSol, especially the fact that we're all volunteers and that we're not a law firm or a social service.

Finally, "*Organize*" means getting into the specific, practical tasks that we need to ask from them. Can they help us boil their problems down to a specific demand that we could fight for (see the 'Demands' section for more on this)? If we did fight for it, would they be able and willing to come to our meetings every week to take part in the planning? Would they be willing to become members of the solidarity network, receive frequent phone calls for actions in support of other workers and tenants, and commit to coming out whenever they could?

Deciding whether to take on the fight

We end the first meeting by making a plan to follow up with them, usually by phone, once SeaSol as a group has had a chance to decide whether we're going to take on the fight. We ordinarily vote on this (majority rules) at our weekly meeting. If it's really urgent, we use a passive consensus process called the "24 hour rule" by emailing a proposal to our higher traffic email list. If no one objects within 24 hours, then the proposal passes. But the situation is rarely urgent enough to require this process, and it's basically impossible to use it for tricky decisions (since we won't have consensus), so usually a decision to take on a fight can wait until the weekly meeting. We make sure not to invite the person (or people) requesting support to be present at this meeting -- otherwise we would never be able to say no.

We use three main criteria in deciding whether to take on a fight: Is the fight compelling enough to motivate our members and supporters? Are the affected workers/tenants ready to participate in the campaign? And, can we win it?

We think about *winnability* as the relationship between two factors: how hard it is for the boss/landlord to give in to our demand, versus how much we can hurt them. Consider a restaurant that owes its former dishwasher \$500 in unpaid wages. The restaurant has one location only, and it's in a touristy area, where potential diners are not all that loyal to any particular restaurant. It is having cash flow problems.

These are all legitimate fights we may well be capable of dealing with. The point is, this model offers the chance to build a foundation for greater things down the line.

SeaSol provides us with the people power we need to start building a movement, and as the network grows, new possibilities will present themselves to us.

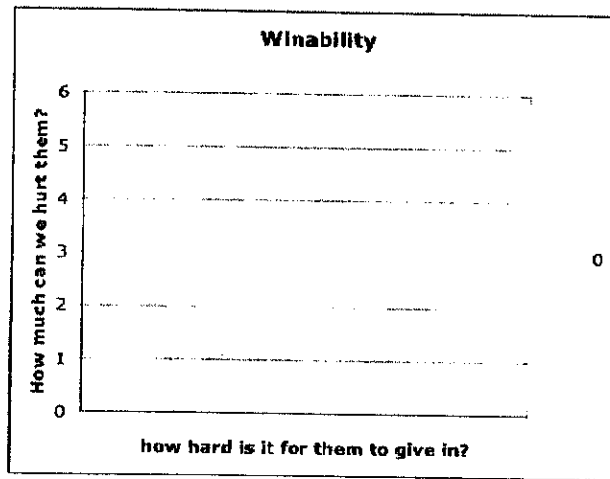


fig. 1: SeaSol's winability graph

DEMANDS

In which we discuss the formulating and delivering of demands.

Formulating the demand.

Before we can decide on whether a fight would be winnable, we need to know exactly what we'd be fighting for. This is something we have to figure out during the initial meeting. Usually when someone first meets with us, they have a problem with their boss or landlord, but they don't yet have a demand. We have to help them come up with a clear, specific, reasonable demand that can be communicated to the boss or landlord, telling them exactly what we expect them to do to address the problem. The demand should be as simple and concise as possible. Sometimes it's necessary to include multiple demands, but it can't be a huge laundry list. If the demand isn't simple, righteous and compelling enough, our own people won't understand or feel strongly enough to come out and fight for it. If it isn't specific enough, we'll end up with confusion over whether or not we've won.

Here is an example of a poorly-formulated demand to give to a landlord:

"Address ongoing issues concerning moisture and mold which have continued to be ignored."

The main problem here is that it isn't specific. How will we know when "ongoing issues" have been "addressed"?

Here is a better version:

"Repair the leaks in the kitchen and living room ceilings, which are causing water damage and mold."

It's clear and specific. There won't be much room for doubt over whether or not it's been done.

Putting it in writing.

When we present our demands, we always do so by handing over a written demand letter. If we were to present our demands verbally, we

that it offers something practical and concrete to people: mutual support, community, and a real, practical defense against your boss and landlord.

What's more, the retention of new members has also been helped along by our momentum: there is always enough work to go around.

No matter how involved someone wants to get initially, we can always find space for them to come lend a hand. When we attract new people through our ongoing fights and new campaigns, we are increasing our capacity, which means we can take on more fights, thus attracting yet more people.

3. Empower ourselves and others:

"Empowerment" is a term bandied about a lot in radical circles. "We need to empower them and empower them..." It can, at times, be used so often it becomes meaningless.

It is also used quite often in circumstances where, quite frankly, nothing of the sort is happening.

In SeaSol, however, we see it very concretely every day.

The process by which we accomplish the goals of our organization—winning fights against bosses and landlords—involves a lot of formal training. People need to learn how we make mobilizing calls. They need to learn how to conduct a meeting with a potential new fight, and they need to learn how to get a picket line together.

To these ends, we have a lot of one on ones, and we have a lot of group trainings.

But people don't really learn how to organize by hearing a talk or by attending trainings. What's most important about the education people get with the Seattle Solidarity Network is that they are given a space in which they can put ideas into action. Any worker that has a few spare hours every week has a place to come and learn the art and science of people power.

There is more to empowerment, however, than just learning new skills.

Sincerely,

Becky Davis and The Seattle Solidarity Network

www.seasol.net / info@seasol.net / 206-350-8650

Delivering the demand.

Our fights always begin with the delivery of the demand en masse. We round up a group of people, anywhere from 10 to 30, to go with the worker or tenant affected and confront the boss or landlord in their office or at their home. It isn't a violent confrontation, but nor is it a friendly visit. The group is there to get the boss or landlord's attention, to show that there is some real support behind the demand, and to make them think twice about retaliating. We don't engage in conversation -- in fact, sometimes these actions are entirely silent. Once the whole group has assembled in front of the boss or landlord, the worker or tenant affected steps forward and hands over the demand letter, and then we leave.

Some have argued that it would be quicker and easier just to send the demand letter by mail. In some cases this might be true, in the sense that we could get our demands met more efficiently this way, but it would not serve our larger goal of building up people power. Delivering the demand in person as a group builds a sense of solidarity, in a way that mailing a letter could never do. The people who take part in it end up feeling personally connected to the fight. This means that if the target boss or landlord gets scared and gives in quickly, it's an empowering victory for everyone who participated in the demand delivery. If the target does not give in quickly, then all those who came out are now much more likely to be willing and eager to come out for the follow-up actions. If we got our demands met just by mailing a letter, the only people who would have participated in the victory would be the one or two individuals who had written the letter and dropped it in the mail. It would do nothing to build up power for the future.

When planning a demand delivery action, we don't want the boss or landlord to know we're coming. Without the element of surprise, the action would have much less impact. They might even arrange to be absent at the time of the action, or to have police there waiting for us. This actually happened to SeaSol once, when we had foolishly forwarded around an online action-announcement in which we named the company we were targeting. Since then, when announcing demand delivery actions we've always made sure to avoid broadcasting the name of the boss or landlord involved. Sometimes we assign them a code name.

1. *Winning Fights Against Bosses and Landlords:*

"Winning," a SeaSol organizer once said, "is like a drug." A very intoxicating and empowering drug.

For those of us who have poured our hearts into a lot of "symbolic" anarchist projects—a lot of anti-police brutality work, anti-war organizing, anti-G8 campaigns, and so on—for those of us who have spent time around these campaigns, we have often felt extremely demoralized.

We have felt this way because despite all the sacrifice, we never won anything. The campaigns never seemed to end after the enemy had conceded something; instead they always seemed to stop when people just became exhausted.

Because of this, the SeaSol model stresses that organizers should have both a good understanding of how to take on bosses and landlords (what tactics work, what don't), and also on how realistic winning a potential new campaign could be.

We like to show this relationship—between our strength and our demands—in our "Winability" graph.

In the graph at the end of this article, we can see that as our demands on a boss become greater, it becomes necessary for us to find more leverage to hurt them. So, the smaller the demand, the less leverage we need. The bigger the demand... you get the idea.

You might think this sounds obvious, and to Anarchists it probably is. This graph is just a nerdy way of teaching people a concept Anarchists have always deeply appreciated—Direct Action.

Even so, Anarchists could still learn a thing or two from SeaSol's take on that old idea.

Part of what makes SeaSol so effective is that we base our actions on our actual strength. If, for example, it was going to take us "5 units" of pressure to win a demand from a boss, but we could only reliably keep up "3 units," we would decline to take on that fight.

Of course, there is no way to quantify any of this, but you understand the concept.

S **TRATEGY**

In which we summarize the basic principles of strategy used in SeaSol fights.

If the boss/landlord doesn't give in before our deadline, then the pressure campaign begins. Through a sustained series of actions, we aim to create an increasingly unpleasant situation for the boss or landlord, from which their only escape is to grant our demands.

There is no sense doing a demand delivery unless we're ready to back it up with an action plan that can force the enemy to give in. Therefore we consider, what are the pressure points we can use against the enemy? How many people can we get out to an action, and what are people willing to do at those actions? All of this takes a serious and thoughtful analysis of our own strength.

Our campaign strategy is based on the basic insight that the boss or landlord doesn't cave in as a result of what we just did to them—they cave in as a result of their fear of what we're going to do next. So we have to be able to *escalate*, or increase the pressure over time, and we have to *pace ourselves* so that we can sustain the fight for as long as it takes. At least once during a fight, we brainstorm possible tactics and order them from least to most pressure. Then we make a plan for how often and in which order we should carry them out.

To illustrate this, here's a list of the actions we took in our fight against Nelson Properties, in order from start to finish:

- 1---We did the mass demand delivery.
- 2---We started the ongoing posting and re-posting of "Do Not Rent Here" posters around many different Nelson buildings.
- 3---We started door-to-door tenants'-rights discussions with current Nelson tenants.
- 4---We started a series of small pickets in front of Nelson's office.
- 5---We delivered letters to Nelson's neighbors, warning them about an as-yet-unnamed slumlord in their midst, and promising to return en masse to discuss the problem with each neighbor in full detail. We made sure Nelson himself got a copy.

And then we won.

SECTION 2

WHY YOU SHOULD START A SOLI. NETWORK

People often accuse anarchists of being opposed to all forms of organization. Some of us are quick to point out, however, that it's not all organization we are opposed to—just apparently the effective ones.

When I first became interested in Anarchist politics, there weren't many groups for me to get involved with. All of the collectives I joined seemed to form, fall apart, and reform—always the same people reshuffling into new groups, disbanding, and starting over again. If they took part in any discernible action at all, it was normally because some other group had organized it.

All over the U.S., in fact, the Anarchist organizations I had worked with could be summed up in one word - they were aimless.

They had vague objectives. They had no discernable, immediate goals. Actually, if you asked most of them what they were doing, I'm not sure you could get a straight answer.

Sound familiar?

These are chronic issues in much of the Anarchist movement today, and if my experience is any indicator, you've probably run into similar problems.

pathy and raising awareness of the issue (ostensibly—really it's always about freaking out the boss), or it can be openly about turning away customers, as in "Don't shop here!"

Picketing a store / restaurant / hotel. The timing of a picket is really important and often warrants scouting the location to determine the time of most possible impact. We have found that direct messages garner the most attention: "Don't Rent/Shop/Eat Here" grabs people's attention more than a nebulous "Justice for all workers!" or similar. When we picket we usually hand out an aggressive flyer at the same time. We have also tried out other tricks to help turn away business. For example, in the Jimmy John's fight, we handed out coupons for Subway; in the Greenlake and Nelson fights we had collected negative online reviews to show to potential customers; in the Tuff Shed fight we had a list of other shed stores to direct people to.

In some cases picketing can antagonize the current employees, especially if they are restaurant workers who are dependent on tips. Recently we have discussed the idea of always doing a week or two of less aggressive, informational picketing or flyering before we start aggressively turning away business. This would give us an opportunity to make contact with the current employees in a positive way and explain the issue to them. We have also begun taking up collections for the tip jar when picketing a coffee shop or restaurant.

Picketing an office. Usually picketing a company's office does not turn away customers, but it does generate embarrassment. Again timing is key. When are their busy times? Sometimes we haven't been sure if they've noticed us, so we've stood right in front of the door until they've asked us to leave.

Postering around a store / restaurant / hotel. Again, the content can be informational or else urging a boycott. Posters are usually targeted at foot traffic so we put them up accordingly (eye-level, facing sidewalks). Posters often get ripped down quickly.

Postering around vacant rental units. The posters usually say "DON'T RENT AT [name of building]", and they highlight problems that will turn off potential renters, such as pests, mold, deposit theft, etc. We emphasize that if someone rents from this landlord, they too will suffer from the landlord's injustices. Here we're appealing to poten-

Whatever energy we can spare from the basic organizing, we try to spend on developing new people's organizing capacity. We have semi-regular trainings covering the basic skills it takes to run a direct action campaign. Afterwards, we often do one-on-one followup sessions where we share our strengths, challenges, and goals as organizers.

There is often a difficult balance to strike between developing newer people and making sure stuff gets done. People don't like to feel micro-managed, but on the other hand, leaving them to fail at a task or drop the ball can be even more demoralizing and disempowering. We have a few strategies to try to walk this fine line. First, we maintain a group culture that more or less frowns on flakiness and values solidness. When you take on a task, everyone expects that you will actually do the task by the time you agreed to, and then report back on your progress. When you do so, you gain some respect within the group. When you don't, you lose some. This generates real social pressure to follow through on what you say you're going to do. Second, we make an effort to push people to move past their fears and try out new aspects of organizing. This can be as simple as doing a task with someone the first time, and then the second time asking, "Why don't you try taking the lead this time?" The standard axiom for this is, "see one, do one, teach one," although it should probably be "see a few, do a lot, teach one". Third, we follow up with each other to offer support and to help work through any obstacles people are facing in getting stuff done. When a new person volunteers to bottom-line something, we often have someone who's more experienced volunteer to be their "backup" person, to help them through any difficulties and to pick up the ball if it gets dropped.

Finally, it's worth mentioning that the most common obstacle to people developing their organizing capacity within SeaSol has been personal disorganization, i.e. not keeping a calendar. Just by the simple step of starting to keep a calendar, we've seen hopelessly flaky people go through dramatic transformations and become awesome organizers.

Hello,

We would like to reach out to you, as concerned neighborhood residents, about a tragic situation which you may be in a position to influence for the better.

Maria and her family, who recently moved after suffering health problems due to landlord negligence, are now suffering further abuse at the hands of an unscrupulous business called Nelson Properties, which is rooted in this neighborhood. Having collecting rent from them without doing basic maintenance, Nelson is now pursuing Maria and her family for even more money that they do not owe and do not have, and is also wrongfully pocketing their deposit - a small extra profit for Nelson, but a huge loss for a low-income worker like Maria.

A group of concerned activists will be roaming the neighborhood soon to distribute more information and to discuss this issue in more depth with each household on the street.

We look forward to meeting you!

Sincerely,

Seattle Solidarity Network

These letters are vague and polite—we don't want to sound like thugs—but they let the boss/landlord and neighbors/coworkers know that we will soon do something that will make them uncomfortable. It contains just enough information so that the boss or landlord themselves knows it's about them, but it won't necessarily be entirely clear to the neighbors/coworkers who this is about. This leaves plenty of room for us to get more specific when we actually visit the neighborhood or workplace.

In this particular example, we had been fighting them for a month, and then they gave in within two days after we delivered this letter.

Postering around the boss or landlord's home. We have found this to be an effective way of airing the target's dirty laundry in front of their neighbors and family members. This is similar to showing up in person but easier—it takes fewer people and can be repeated over and over as posters get torn down. Make sure to include the boss/landlord's name and address on the poster and if possible a photo of the boss/landlord or of their house.

S STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZING CAPACITY

In which we discuss the challenges of organizational structure and of developing solid organizers.

At the beginning, SeaSol had almost no formal structure. There wasn't much need for it, since we were a tiny group of people with a low level of activity. We realized that we might later have more need for formal structures, as the group got bigger and more active, but we did not try to set them up in advance. In hindsight, this seems to have been a wise decision. If we had spent our time arguing about, planning, and then maintaining formal structures that we hypothetically might need at some point in the future, it would have been a serious drag on our ability to start taking action and building real strength. Instead, over time we have added on pieces of structural organization (e.g. an organizing team, a secretary role, a definition of membership) on an as-needed basis, as the group's increased size and complexity has created both the need for them and the capacity to maintain them.

For example, for our whole first year we informally left almost all administrative work to one dedicated, reliable person who had a ton of free time. That was who answered the calls, replied to emails, and set up the initial meetings for new fights. The role was not elected or even formally defined. The work just needed to get done, and if we only had one person who was able and willing to do it consistently, that was who had to do it. Then later on, once we had multiple reliable and committed people who were able to shoulder that burden, we created a formally defined role called "secretary duty", which changes hands almost every week.

or (2) if they're a good actor, they can go through with the viewing and act very uncomfortable about the people picketing/flyering outside.

Online reviews. Some businesses rely heavily on the internet for getting customers. There are several popular websites where anyone can post reviews about businesses. A sudden barrage of negative reviews can have a major impact. Plus it's a fun tactic that lots of people can do on their own time, and even supporters in other cities can help out. For this tactic to be effective, the target has to be able to see that the barrage of negative reviews is connected to your conflict and demands.

Satirical charity events. If your target is known to be wealthy and is vulnerable to public shaming, holding highly-visible "charity" events on their behalf can be a clever way to ridicule them. To get the most possible mileage out of this tactic, plan it well in advance and advertise heavily with posters and/or flyers. Here's an example:

Impoverished landlords Harpal Supra and Tajinder Singh need your help! For months they have not been able to maintain decent health and safety conditions - such as clean drinking water and ventilation - in the house at 24260 132nd Ave SE, Kent. In protest, the family who lives there has decided to withhold rent money from them. The landlords are in such need of this money that they are now in the process of evicting the family!

You and your family are warmly invited to a Charity Bake Sale for Harpal Supra and Tajinder Singh, from 3pm to 6pm on Sunday, April 26, at 24260 132nd Ave SE, Kent - right next to the Gurudwara Sacha Marg.

Come eat, and contribute whatever you can - even \$1 or 50 cents - to help Harpal Supra and Tajinder Singh.

When we finally won our year-long fight against Lorig Associates, one of their conditions for giving in was that we formally agree not to hold any more charity bake sales for Bruce Lorig.

Tenant investigation. When fighting a large landlord, you might find it worthwhile to go door-to-door informing all the other tenants of their rights and asking about landlord abuses. We call this a "tenant investigation". We generally go in with a half-page flyer that lists a bunch of common landlord-tenant problems and invites people to get in touch if they'd like more info about their rights. We make a point of leaving some of these lying around the building, so that management is sure to know about our visit. This tactic tends to make landlords pretty ner-

Mobilizing

In which we describe how we consistently turn out enough people for our actions.

Since the point of a solidarity network is to engage in direct action, mobilizing people for actions is one of the most important things we do as a group. We take our ability to mobilize very seriously. We try not to waste people's time or mess people around by frequently canceling or rescheduling actions, and we try to make sure our actions are worth showing up to.

SeaSol's main tool for mobilizing is a phone tree, currently with about 170 people. Each member of the organizing team (What's that? See the section on "Organizing capacity and group structure") is a "branch" on the tree and has about 10 people to mobilize each time we have a major action. Whenever possible we want to use the strength of existing social bonds, so for example if someone on the phone tree is a close friend of one of the organizers, then they should probably be on that organizer's calling list. We also have a mass email list for action announcements. Mass emails rarely cause many people to show up, but they're useful for a reminder or for reference. An individual email sent to a friend who checks email a lot ("Hey Kate, can you come out for this?") is a different story -- personal invites can work well in any medium, depending on the habits and preferences of the person you're inviting.

Regardless of how we're contacting someone for an action, our goal is always to get an answer from them -- yes, no, or maybe -- as to whether or not they'll be coming. A person who has said "Yes, I'll be there" to another human being is much more likely to show up to an action than someone who's just received a message. For that reason, when making phone calls we make a concerted effort to actually talk to people rather than talking to their voice mail. Before leaving a message, we try calling on two different days, sometimes at different times.

It's important to have realistic expectations about turnout. If you want to get a lot of people to an action, it usually takes a lot of work and organization. Out of thirty people who say "yes", we've generally found that

Meetings

In which we discuss what it takes for solidarity network meetings to be inclusive, democratic, and effective at getting things done.

Meetings may be a boring topic to write or read about, but in fact, we spend more time together in meetings than we do on picket lines. Meetings are where the actual planning of our campaigns happens. Meetings are also where we put direct democracy into practice. In this section, we'll go over a few of the key practices we've developed in the course of three years of SeaSol meetings.

We meet every week, and we really get stuff done during these meetings. When SeaSol first formed, we only met twice per month. The long gaps between regular meetings meant that most of the logistics and planning of our fights had to get done separately in between these meetings, in small ad hoc planning sessions among the most active organizers. This made it hard for newer people to start participating in a meaningful way. It was also hard on our schedules. When we finally switched to meeting every week, splitting the meeting into smaller "breakout" sessions where needed, it seriously improved our ability to grow and to take on more fights. Now, these regular meetings are the place where almost all of our actual planning gets done, and there's rarely a need for separate planning sessions in between. The regular meetings now provide a space where any SeaSol member who wants to step up can easily start participating, alongside more experienced folks, in the planning and execution of our campaigns. Having this "permeability" within the group, where new people can easily volunteer for jobs and can get involved in real organizing very quickly, gives a huge boost to our ability to bring in and develop new organizers. Also our meetings are now much better attended, since they're much more worth attending.

We assign clear responsibility for specific tasks. In a representative democracy, or in a staff-driven organization that has a Board of Directors, there is usually a fixed distinction between "legislative" and "executive" roles, in other words, between those who make the decisions and those who carry them out. In a direct, participatory democracy like SeaSol, this is not the case. Because we have no fixed "executive" who can be expected to carry out the decisions of the group, whenever we decide