

The living revolution: building the alternative

by Adam Twine

The workshop was led by Helen and Alison – there were 11 of us in total

Programme for the day:

1. Normalising Nonviolence
2. Building the alternative society
3. Film followed by Lunch
4. Mapping utopia
5. Building our own alternative
6. Planning for December and Evaluation

1. Normalising Nonviolence

We were invited to suggest ways in which violence is normalised within our society and communities... there were lots of suggestions including; factory farming, media reporting, car culture, pornography, labour exploitation, bad architecture, use of fossil fuels etc.

We then split into small groups to look at what was it that was violent about each suggestion and the nonviolent alternative. The group I was in looked at factory farming, considered the violence lay in the treatment of the animals and felt that farming systems that respected the animals being farmed were a less violent alternative – such as organic farming. (We also considered not eating animals). Another suggestion that we looked at was the police. The aspect that was considered violent was that they are used as tools of the State to protect moneyed interests, the often have targets that they have to meet which can get in the way of appropriate policing and in certain situations they are outside the community in which they are operating. An alternative was to take more responsibility for conflict resolution in our own communities.

When we reflected on all the examples we had examined we could see that there are often living alternatives all around us but they are not being implemented to a significant degree.

2. Building the alternative society.

This was an exercise using a plate with marked on one side with an 'A' for 'alternative' and on the other an 'R' for 'resistance'.

The plate was spun and someone picked out from a bag a slip of paper with such things as 'rubbish', "random' acts of violence', 'fossil fuels' etc. Depending on how the plate fell we were given 20 seconds to come up with an example of either resistance or an alternative to the situation.

In the evaluation that followed this exercise it was clear that there is a blurring of what is 'resistance' and what is 'alternative', and for change to occur both have an important role and how one requires the other, the resistance to unsettle/wake up from the accepted norm and pattern and the alternative so that once disturbed there is something to change to. In my sharing it was felt that resistance can also create resistance (to considering change) and that in seeking to encourage change it is not helpful to blame or make people feel guilty.

The film was from the global oneness project. To watch click on <http://www.globalonenessproject.org/videos/sevacafe>

After lunch we played "it"but with a difference, there was no 'home' but if you were in contact with one other person you were safe from "it"... our space was probably too small for the difference from normal "it" to show up, but in a much larger space the change from instinctive self-preservation and running away from 'it' to trying to help someone by running towards them when they are threatened by 'it' would have had more chance to be expressed....

4. Mapping Utopia

This exercise involved setting out some of parameters for a group of people in time and space and then splitting into pairs to examine how various aspects (political, legal, economic, social, education, land and property, transport, public services etc) would ideally manifest themselves in our set utopia.

We chose to have a community of 100 people (Ann had come across the idea that our brains can comfortably remember around 150 individuals properly) that would be representative of a 'real' population in terms of age, gender, ethnicity etc balance. We set it in a low density urban and temperate environment and assumed it would be naturally connected to its wider community.

The pair looking at economics looked at what is valued - labour/goods/services/currency. How to trade with wider community; how community members could work outside the community; currencies within and without the community; and the potential for challenges - banking, sale of place, young and old people etc.

The pair looking at political assumed direct representation, (non compulsory) monthly meetings for whole community, other interest group monthly meetings, ideally consensus decision making with a fallback of a majority decision and review of decision.

The pair looking at education considered knowledge fairs, community supported homeschooling, lifelong learning, outside recreation and social activities.

The pair looking at transport produced an interesting diagram that I won't attempt to mangle into words here...

And the pair looking at public services felt the need for a certain level of internal skill capacity, the value of good communications to reduce the need for welfare systems the links to the wider community.

It was interesting to note at the end only about half of us had any significant desire to live in this constructed 'utopia'!

5. Building our own alternative

Following on from this exercise we then split into a different pairs to ask and actively listen to each other considering how in our own lives we are incorporating aspects of an alternative /utopian society, how that is expressed in our local community/work place and what are the structural and global links of such an action.

6. Finally we spent some time considering how we might want to make best use of our final Saturday in December. There were several suggestions put out, celebration, direct action, food etc... **See Chris's and Kiyos recent e-mails...** We felt that as there were only three of the year group present at the end of the day we were too unrepresentative to decide anything ourselves but were very clear that it really needs everyone's input over the next three weeks to develop the suggestions so that we can really make a well considered (and hopefully speedy) decision in October to make the most of the opportunity that December's time offers.

Alternative resources written on wall paper..

- Diggers and Dreamers – examples of community living
- Peace House – Birmingham
- 56a Infoshop – Fairshares food-coop, Southwark, London.
- Bedales – Sudbury valley school, child directed education
- Education Otherwise
- Kew village eco-garden
- Growing communities – Hackney
- Supermarket bypass – Hackney
- Swap, share and give away – freecycle
- Transition town movement
- Windowsill and guerrilla gardening – anywhere