

THANKS BUT NO TANKS



Learnings from Disrupt Land Forces

or

How to organize a decentralized intersectional direct action campaign
and also have the most fun of your life*

***Disclaimer: we don't actually know how to do that, yet somehow we did that. These are some thoughts on how we did that. There are also some reflections on missed opportunities, gaps, stuff ups and how to fix them. Margie has a wealth of knowledge of historical and contemporary nonviolence theory and practice. Zelda brings learnings from indigenous and 'peasant' resistance movements, from intersectional feminism and from her creative practice. Between us we made Disrupt Land Forces happen. The following are Zelda's writings and incorporate Margie's work and insight. Everyone who stepped up in significant ways during the campaign was invited to feed in to this document. Many voices are reflected here. We hope to do it all again. With you.**

¹ Jarrah and Greg held this Rheinmetall Unmanned Combat Warrior for hours!

0. WHAT DID WE DO?

We disrupted a massive arms fair.

During seven days of creative, ingenious, staunch, peaceful, collaborative actions, over three hundred people spoke truth to the power of the war makers at Brisbane's Land Forces weapons expo. Our Festival of Resistance unfolded in a whirlwind of humanity discovering itself, as we supported each other to take risks, make art, experiment and disrupt the military industrial death machine that is wrecking our planet and her peoples. There was rage, there was grief and there were moments of despair, but above all, growing by the day, there was joy. As we took action together to Disrupt Land Forces, as we planned and played together at our base in Jagera Hall, something extraordinary and alchemical happened. Solidarity transcended ideology or intellect or politics and became, simply, love. It was exquisite. There was a buzz running through our collective spaces; we were all high on the magic of our making. The community we created over those seven days provided a glimpse of the future we hold in our hearts and it is magnificent.



Blocking the bump in

Disrupt Land Forces got off to a spectacular start on May 27 with a tank blockade action disrupting the bump in at Brisbane Convention Centre – a day before the Festival of Resistance's planned launch. Two of us happened to be in the neighbourhood when a Rheinmetall Unarmed Combat Warrior and a Ripley cannon mount came rolling around the corner headed for the loading dock. And ... go! The sugar glider spirit was with us as two of us ran, jumped and climbed onto the moving weapons and quickly messaged the rest of us. We ran! Within a few minutes fifty of us had surrounded the weapons and one person had locked on to the Ripley machine. Within an hour, a hundred of us were dancing in the street. After hours of disruption to the weapons industry, four of us were arrested and all of us were elated with the people power we had raised together. It was a glorious start.



Piter, Aunty Irene and Uncle George: elation after our successful weapons blockade

Lighting the fire

On May 28 we held our planned launch event, lighting solidarity fires simultaneously at the Brisbane Sovereign Aboriginal Embassy in Musgrave Park and in the highlands of West Papua. Aunty Karen, Yuggera elder, had proposed lighting the fires to echo the distress fires that people in times past have sent to warn each other of the incursions of police and soldiers in these lands. Karen's idea was to connect us in Kurilpa (aka South Brisbane) with our friends in West Papua, to signal that we recognise their distress and to pledge our support. We would connect the fires via zoom, in a fantastical merging of ancient and contemporary communications methods. We never thought in a million years that we could make it happen. What with Indonesia throttling the internet in West Papua, the vagaries of weather and the difficulties of even routine contact with people in West Papua, the vision seemed almost impossible to bring to life. To our astonishment, the vision became reality. The Zoom connections were made, the fires were lit and there we were inside a breathtaking communion of First Nations peoples sharing stories and expressing solidarity. By firelight. And by Zoom. We were launched.



Solidarity fire in West Papua, lit by Rode Wanimbo, second from right



Uncle Kevin Buzzacott speaking at the solidarity fire in Kurilpa (Brisbane)

Fever Pitch

The solidarity grew as we explored tactics, exchanged ideas and planned together through our workshops on Saturday 29. Then we amped it right up through dance during Saturday night's concert.



Boe and Poro enjoying Accomplice Collective at Saturday's concert, above, dinner at the hall, below



Sunday morning, May 30, one hundred of us were on the doorstep of two weapons companies in the heart of Brisbane's (literal) military-industrial complex in Redbank: Rheinmetall and DB Schenker.



*Mujib reads a solidarity message from Kabul on the corner of Fascist Way.
A DB Schenker factory is in the background: Nazi era/contemporary war profiteer*

The police didn't like our poles. They confiscated the bamboo we were using for our banners. While they were busy with that, we switched the street signs to read "Fascist Way" and "War Crimes Drive", references to the millions made by Rheinmetall and DB Schenker from the persecution and murder of Jewish people under Nazism.



*Trail of blood, from Germany to Afghanistan to West Papua.
Our friends in Germany took action at DB Schenker in solidarity with us on this day.*



DB Schenker / Rheinmetall action. West Papua - Afghanistan - Jewish diaspora solidarity

Sunday night we disrupted the bump in for a second time, with a Grim Reaper figure atop a 'Sensitive Cargo' truck and a solid circle of arms around the base. Uncle Kevin Buzzacott gave a memorable speech calling for the wisdom of the elders to be heeded: "We know the way home". The truck-jumpers and arms-linkers held up bump in for hours.



We linked arms around the 'sensitive cargo' truck while Jim the Grim Reaper and Andy used it as a stage.

Monday we visited Boeing, Nioa, Skyborne Technologies (killer drone manufacturers) and Thales (exporters to Indonesian Special Forces, Kopassus), where two of us were arrested to the sweet sounds of Black Brothers performed by Uncle George and Aunty Irene Dimara.



David and Jason taking action at Thales

Tuesday June 1, the opening of the Land Forces expo, we created a cacophony. This really was a carnival of chaos, with slippery blood spills blocking one entrance, the Quakers for Peace blocking another and total aural and visual mayhem going on at the third. It was a long, hard walk into the Convention Centre for the war makers that day. Our Vuvuzelas (plastic horns), our Cazerolazo (banging pots and pans), our rape whistles and our voices were all at fever pitch. We set out to make the Land Forces participants uncomfortable. We succeeded.



Slippery slope for the war mongers Pic: Nic Chesterfield

All ages, all cultures, all genders

The creativity, once unleashed, became a raging torrent. We are stunned, thrilled and just incredibly impressed by all the ways people took action, and by the spirit of radical respect people extended to each other throughout the Festival of Resistance. (Radical respect = accepting and allowing divergent styles of protest even when, or especially when, we find them hard to understand.) This respect for difference was empowering and enabled a vast range of people to participate in whatever ways suited them best. Tuesday saw Butoh Hauntings, hardcore heckling, a citizen's arrest of Christopher Pyne – again, invoking the spirit of the Sugar Glider with a stunning leap onto a moving car – poetry, storytelling and a deeply moving 'Say Their Names' ceremony for the children killed in Gaza. On Wednesday the Quaker Grannies set up a 24-hour vigil, Climate Angels shed blood on the threshold, twenty of us stormed the expo and climbed onto a tank (hi Rheinmetall! It's us again!) and a raucous, theatrical 'Dinner of Death' parade ruined the schmooze fest of the war makers down at South Bank. We were having fun. Thursday June 3 kicked off with a singing installation at the main entrance and at midday, exhausted after seven days of actions, we still had energy for a dance party to smash the patriarchy.

The solidarity is strong with this one

We have to talk about the kitchen. Thrown together, last minute, no budget, no resources, still the kitchen served us two plentiful, tasty, nutritious meals a day, on time, with smiles, with hugs even. Our kitchen and our logistics team were beyond science; they may have created a breach in the time-space continuum. Our minds were blown. Not only did the kitchen feed us and the logistics team equip us every day, they did so in multiple locations (e.g. at the barricades, the solidarity fire, the watch house)

without skipping a beat. Brisbane locals are off the charts for solidarity. The hospitality of our Brisbane people extended to supreme street medicine, legal observing and to rock solid watch house and court support. We highly recommend Brisbane as a place to hold a week-long Festival of Resistance. Brisbane folks are up for anything and can do everything. To all our Brisbane people, we heart you very much. ❤️



Sue (left) being a legend, with crew

37 of us were arrested

while standing up (and sitting in) for humanity. Inside the building, the planners and facilitators of crimes against humanity plied their killing trade. Outside the building Queensland police arrested us for actions such as: blowing a whistle, sitting on the ground, tweeting, performing Butoh, sugar gliding, holding a wok and dancing. None of us used violence, none of us manufactured or sold weapons that will maim human beings and decimate the biosphere. 37 of us will face court. The war criminals were protected by hundreds of police to carry on their 'legitimate business' of exporting terror.

We will never stop

The people who came together to Disrupt Land Forces were empowered and elated by the experience. We came away inspired and buoyed by the love and solidarity that flowed in from around the world. We will not stop resisting until the oppression has ended and we are travelling together on the path of healing our planet and her peoples. [Click here](#) to kick in for our legal costs to show you stand with us. Stay with us for more beautiful actions for peace and justice in a city or forest near you.

And now

Following is some analysis of how we made all of this happen, what we missed, where we stuffed up and the thinking that inspires us.

1. PREPARING THE GROUND

CONSULT

The first thing we did was consult. Our friends at Peace Action in Aotearoa had successfully stopped arms fairs on that land, so we asked for a strategy session with them to hear about organizing models and tactics they had tried. This session was invaluable. Many inspirations and ideas for Disrupt were gained. We highly recommend that folks consult with allies at the outset of your campaigns.



Peace Action Aotearoa

FORM A COG

Our next step was to form a COG, or Core Organizing Group, along the lines described in George Lakey's book "How We Win". A COG is a small group of activists who are committed to the campaign and will carry out most of the organizing work. We decided to try this organizing model. In an ideal world, the activists making up the COG would emerge from an existing movement and would volunteer for this work in response to a call out. As we had no existing coherent anti-militarist movement to draw from, we invited specific individuals to organize with us, representing a good mix of age, locations, genders and cultures.

In previous campaigns, we have noticed that the bulk of organizing work often falls to a small number of people (an unofficial COG) who are then held accountable in large group meetings of people who may have no actual involvement with the work. This model, of the large public organizing meeting overseeing a small organizing crew, has disparity and inefficiency built in. It is disempowering for both the organizers and the larger group and leads to high rates of drop out. The large public meeting is a valuable organizing tool and we held three of these during the campaign, but we relied on the COG for our day to day organizing. This enabled the COG to work quickly and efficiently.

Our COG was very clear about our mission: to resource and empower affinity groups, individuals and collectivities to take action before and during the Land Forces Expo. COG members worked to find and support other key organizers to carry out discrete projects, such as run a public meeting, record a song, make a film, design an action. We took on key parts of the work ourselves each, running logistics, creating content, designing actions. Activists were expected to self-manage their tactics and decision making, within our stated values and in collaboration with other groups. The COG was available as a coordinating body and for any action needs — food, banner materials, photos, information, care, theoretical grounding — by request. The COG supplied a heap of online and offline resources, including suggested messaging, and brought people together. We were a support team not a management team.

This was an experiment in organizing and we learnt a great deal from it.



We don't have a picture of the actual COG but here is a group of people who contributed heaps.

What worked about the COG

The experiment was a success. The core organizing group was focused, efficient, quickly built trust, developed good guidelines and established a mini community of care. The culture of the COG — generous, loving, nimble and bold — became the culture of the campaign. We found that several people are enough to make a good decision. Each person had their own networks to draw on or reach out to, so we were able to outsource bits of work to community members through COG networks. We were also able to insource from our communities, seeking advice from, consulting with and asking for ideas from a range of people and groups. Agreements and protocols were easy to establish as we were building on existing common ground, not ‘reinventing the wheel’ like every large campaign meeting ever.

5-7 people is enough to run a great campaign. The idea is solid.



Christine and Zelda: my pom poms match Christine's earrings

The mission statement we produced at the start of the campaign is worth sharing here in case anyone else might like to adapt it for their own campaign. This broad ‘participants’ agreement’ helped guide and focus the work of our COG. Reading it back now is gratifying — we managed to do all the things we set out to do. COGs work well.

DLF Core Organizing Group (COG) Mission Statement

COG campaign goals

- To disrupt the Land Forces Expo, including and ultimately shutting it down
- To make the Land Forces Expo a very uncomfortable experience for participants
- To make Australia an unappealing place to hold arms fairs

COG movement goals

- To build energy and momentum for peace activism
- To connect peace activism with campaigns around refugees, climate, poverty, toxic masculinity, inequality, human rights, extinction, sovereignty and others
- To build anti-militarist alliances with human rights and earth rights movements
- To frame weapons companies as war profiteers and as primary campaign targets
- To energise and inspire new people to campaign on the weapons industry

Scope of the COG

- Run a public-facing, project specific website
- Run an Instagram account
- Run a co-hosted FB event
- Act as a 'think tank' and resource centre, devising slogans, action ideas, targets, graphics, fact sheets, posters etc that can be used by action groups if they wish
- Outreach to, inspire and mobilize diverse nonviolence groups, especially i) impacted communities and ii) direct actionists
- Be a hub for coordinating teams of direct actionists and frontline communities
- Plan specific actions, within our capacity
- Liaise with other organizing teams, eg the Quakers, the Socialists, the NGOs

NOT the scope of the COG

- COG is not a decision-making body. Different resistance cohorts are responsible for their own planning and decision making.
- COG is not a boss. We invite groups to work in a broad collaboration of decentralized, autonomous groups. COG does not seek to determine the messaging, targets, tactics, membership or any other aspect of the groups we are in collaboration with.
- COG does not interfere. The COG will support and resource action groups if and when we are invited to do that.

COG core values

- Active nonviolence: we do not organize to harm other people or other living creatures. We do organize to get in the way of war profiteers.
- Practice respectful communication and behaviour between us all
- Create communities of care, before, during and after actions
- Try new things and support others to try new things
- Embrace mass community participation and many varieties of resistance options to enhance accessibility
- Implement horizontal organizing
- Elevate voices of affected communities
- Upskill as we go

- Build productive alliances & relationships within/between communities
- Strive for consistency and clarity
- Encourage laughter, play and fun

COG membership

- COG is designed to be a small, time-limited, project-specific group. We are trying this idea out based on George Lakey's experience, covered in his book *How We Win*.
- There are currently 5 people on the COG team, from Narrm and Meanjin
- Membership of COG is open to activists who are keen to focus on the Disrupt Land Forces campaign from now until the end of June.
- COG inclusion involves weekly meetings and quite a lot of organizing work.
- We welcome newer activists as well as experienced activists.



What didn't work so well with our COG

Call out

We sent the mission statement as an attachment via Signal and email, as an invitation, to a number of activist and peace groups. This callout method did not work for us. The semi-public call out had zero responses. We only had responses from people we approached personally/individually.

Anxiety

We noticed there was a bit of confusion and concern about the organizing model. Some were worried that a 'hand-picked' or closed group entailed a hierarchy, even though we made it clear that the COG was not intended as a decision-making body — all affinity groups and collectivities were expected to make their own decisions about messaging, tactics, membership and so on. Some people found it hard to imagine a campaign made up of autonomous, decentralized actors. As often happens when a new idea is introduced, there was some anxiety about trying the COG model.

Consistency

Then, the people who joined the COG at the start were not the same as the people who stepped up to do the work. As time went on, it became clear that some of our people in Brisbane were working in a highly committed way and needed to be part of the COG — consulted about logistics, outreach, schedules etc and able to feed into core organizing processes. We added these people to the COG when they stepped up, this was easy to do, but of course they were not across all of the information accumulated through the early months of organizing. Others, who were part of the COG from the outset, did not end up playing a role at Disrupt, partly due to covid.

Coordinators

This change in membership was ok, but it was not ideal. In the end, only two people — Margie and I — were with the COG from beginning to end. This meant that only two people had an overall picture of the campaign and all its moving parts; there were only two coordinators. Our campaign was decentralized enough that when Margie and I were both arrested on the first morning of the Land Forces Expo it really didn't affect the running of the Festival. Still, ideally five to seven people would be empowered to coordinate. It was an exhausting amount of work for two people.

Solutions?

If you are considering trying this organizing structure, put some thought into how you will invite people to work in your core organizing group, how you can consolidate the commitment of your COG and how you will integrate those who step up as organizers during the campaign. Implementing an induction process, resources handover and role reviews are some of the solutions we are imagining.



Margie was arrested while attempting a citizen's arrest of former Defence Minister Christopher Pyne

CREATE DIGITAL RESOURCES

A website and social media channels are a mainstay of most campaigns and so it was with Disrupt Land Forces. Something that worked beautifully for us was creating digital resources, downloadable from our website, such as fact sheets on the 5 weapons companies we targeted, logos, banners and placard designs, social media tiles, flyers — enough material for people to set up and run an action independently. Alongside these public resources was a shared folder on Google drive (we know, not an ideal platform) that contained our mission statement, our media contacts, sample press releases, key videos and photos — all the resources needed by the media team, or by new COG members. Having our digital resources uploaded and ready to go well in advance was so good.



2. Sowing the seeds

REACH OUT, LISTEN UP

From December 2020 – June 2021 we did a huge amount of groundwork reaching out to, meeting and connecting with folks who might want to Disrupt Land Forces. In line with our mission statement, we mainly sought out direct actionists and people from impacted communities, ie refugees, First Peoples and other survivors of military violence and police brutality. We reached out in all of the ways: making calls, emails and texts, on our website and socials, connecting in person, running art shows, turning up for rallies and actions initiated by our allies, holding public meetings, over radio and

in print. We reached out to listen and learn. What are the hot issues for you and your community? How can we make this campaign more meaningful and relevant for you? Where do our objectives intersect and how can we achieve them together? We looked at where Australian made weapons are going and connected with people impacted by Australian police and military deals. We built their perspectives and stories into the campaign.

"I noticed how much people experienced ownership and involvement with the project. This was happening from early on, with the outreach and invitations. There was an openness to different types of involvement and an ability for people to have ownership of the campaign, maintaining autonomy about their own input."

We hoped that the people we were meeting would support our Festival of Resistance, of course. Our outreach was focused on making a meaningful connection, however, rather than on 'recruitment'. The web of connections that we made and the insight we gained helped to create a solid understanding of the intersectional nature of our struggle. Some of the people we connected with became involved in the campaign during the Festival. Many others supported us. Even more importantly, we had done some foundational work towards creating an anti-militarist movement with frontline affected people in the centre.



Aunty Irene Dimara sings it to the arms dealers

FRONTLINES TO THE FRONT

We started to reach out through our existing networks, connecting with radical youth collectives, Quakers, Catholic Workers, Extinction Rebellion branches, Stop Adani campaigners and numerous First Nations, peace, environment and refugee solidarity groups. It was important to us to hold space for frontline affected folks and invite you

to centre your voices. We are already well connected with West Papuan people both in Australia and in Papua, so the West Papuan community's experience of Indonesian militarism was an organic focus for our campaign. We already have a commitment to active solidarity with Australian First Nations peoples, so resisting dispossession was another natural focus for Disrupt. Through our networks, we are connected with activists and artists from the Latin, European, Arab, Pasifika and SE Asian diasporas, so we reached out to all of you, listened up and invited collaboration.

"Disrupt Land Forces happened during a period of intense military activity in West Papua, just after the bombings of Palestine and the release of the Afghan files [documents revealing the extent of Australian war crimes in Afghanistan]. It was very close to the skin. Having spokespeople from those communities made it very real and personal."



We launched with a solidarity fire, listening to stories of colonial violence from Australia and West Papua, and exploring our personal connections to militarism.

Our Festival of Resistance included plenty of visual art, dance, music, theatre and poetry, alongside speeches, banners, marches, blockades, pickets and interventions. We provided many ways for people to connect with the campaign and welcomed all nonviolent tactics. A person who has recently escaped a war zone may not want to be in a situation of confrontation with police; or that might be exactly what they want. We tried to abandon assumptions and remain open to all levels and styles of participation. This helped us to connect with a greater number of people and a greater diversity of people, because we were not asking people to conform to any one way of doing things. We extended an open invitation for people to participate in whatever way they found meaningful (with the caveat of zero harm to other beings). We then provided myriad channels for people and groups to engage both artistically and in protest. Outreach and deep listening were major components of the preparatory work.



Our children at the vigil for the 66 children murdered by Israeli bombs in Gaza during May '21

We missed ...

Africans! We missed you! There was no substantial African representation in the Festival of Resistance. (For international friends reading this, people from Eastern Africa are among the most recent refugees to land on these shores, with some thousands of Sudanese people in particular arriving over the past decade. Prior to that, in the 70s and 80s a handful of refugees from southern Africa gained political asylum in Australia.) African peeps, we're so sorry we missed out on having you there! We were crazy busy with the amount of outreach and other prep we were doing. We didn't have existing connections with African peeps, we needed to build those. We needed another 2 or 3 core organizers with us. We ran out of time and capacity. Still, this was a failure on our part. I am disappointed that we didn't manage to connect with more of you. We missed out on such wealth of experience and creativity. We missed hearing your stories and your priorities. Plus, you have the best music and are the most stylish dressers of anyone. (Zelda's personal opinion, not official position of Disrupt Land Forces 😊)

Sorry. We have noticed the omission and we pledge to do better.

ART SHOWS, PUBLIC MEETINGS, FLYERS, RADIO, STALLS

While we continued building our digital resources and creating content for our social channels, we spoke on radio, held stalls, distributed flyers, ran an art exhibition and held two public meetings. Zelda looked after most of the writing and social content, while Margie and Christine were prolific networkers on the ground in Brisbane, holding stalls, attending meetings, running actions. Our beautiful Quaker allies handed out 4000 flyers. We feel like our emails and flyers did not bring people to the Festival but ensured that the locals of South Brisbane, as well as our national allies and friends,

were aware of the Disrupt Land Forces campaign and formed a passive support base, especially in the vicinity of the actions. Community radio programmers were awesome supporters both before and during the week of actions, hosting Margie, Zelda and numerous other spokespeople. We really did a LOT of media/PR/outreach.



Margid and Dawn, solid as the rock

LANGUAGE MATTERS

Whether online or offline, the way we communicate matters. I paid close attention to language and aimed for words that include, encourage and support people. We tried to avoid terms and habits of speech we have inherited from dominant systems. Progressive language helps us to dismantle those systems while enabling a broad range of people to participate. Loving, inclusive language fosters security and connection. Language matters.

THE INCLUSIVE WE

Soon after I joined my local rural fire brigade I began hearing 'We need you at training because we don't have any women in the brigade'. I was thus twice alienated from the group I had joined. Firstly, the 'we' in the sentence clearly excludes me: 'we' men lack women in 'our' brigade. Secondly, I joined the fire brigade because I want to help fight fires, not because I am a woman. I am not there to fulfil a quota or make men feel better about patriarchal privilege. All too often I hear similar statements in the movement for peace and justice, usually motivated by a desire for equity, but linguistically excluding the very people whose inclusion is desired. I am careful about using pronouns that include everybody.

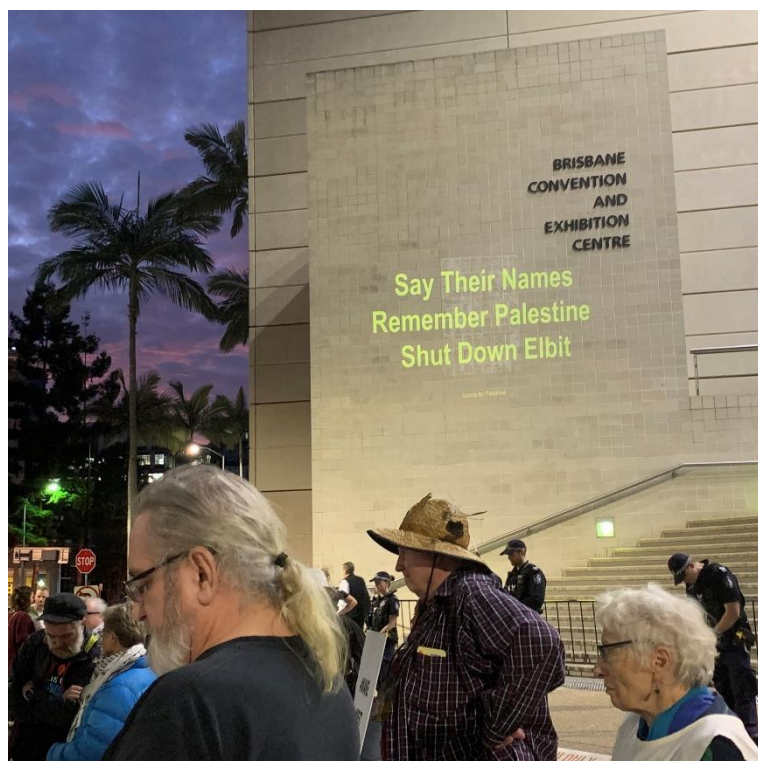
What does this look like?

“We want Arab people to lead this action. We need to contact them,” erases any Arab people in the space. An inclusive way might be “Would the Arab people among us like to lead this action?” or “Who here has connections with Arabic-speaking communities?” It feels more human to speak *with* and *to* people from a particular demographic, rather than *about*.

It’s hurtful for people of colour to hear a speaker say “As white people we...”. A person wanting to address specific experiences of white people could instead say “The white people among us...” or “As a white person I ...”.

Rather than “As middle-class people we...” it’s possible to say “Those of us who are middle class...”.

It is nearly always the socially dominant group that uses an exclusive we. Let’s undo that. Let’s double check that ‘we’ are including everybody in the space.



Vigil for 66 Palestinian children

BE INVITING

I invite people to act based on their will for change rather than on activist guilt. I try to make my calls to action inviting, as in “Let’s smash the patriarchy today” rather than “We should smash the patriarchy today”.

Rather than “We have to push back against this repression” we tried statements like “We can push back” or “What if we pushed back?” or “How about we push back?”.

‘Have to’, ‘need to’, ‘should’ and ‘must’ shoulder us activists with burdens, the responsibility to fix the world. Many of us already feel overwhelmed, guilty, ashamed, inadequate in the face of the toxic system we live with. A simple re-phrasing of our calls to action as invitations, rather than as duties, draws on good will and nurtures agency.

“We all want a space that is free from sexism so let’s apply our best feminist tools” acknowledges the good will of the people while encouraging active anti-sexist work.

Let’s smash the patriarchy. Not because we have to but because we want to. It will feel good.



Uncle Kev pushing back on repression

SAY WHAT YOU WANT

Vision! Dream! Imagine! Articulate the world we want. Expressing the vision helps us to realize it. We can’t create what has not yet been imagined.

We imagined a Festival of Resistance that would be intersectional and decentralized, joyful and disruptive, big and bold and then we expressed that vision over and over again.

In the 2 weeks prior to Disrupt we saturated our social media with the story of how we wanted the Festival to be. We asked people to bring to life “the world we hold in our hearts”. Generosity. Dancing. Kindness. All of the colours. All of the peoples. Forests. Oceans. Resistance. Art. Music. Solidarity. All ages, all cultures, all genders. United af. #Demilitarize #Decolonize #Regenerate. We said it again and again.

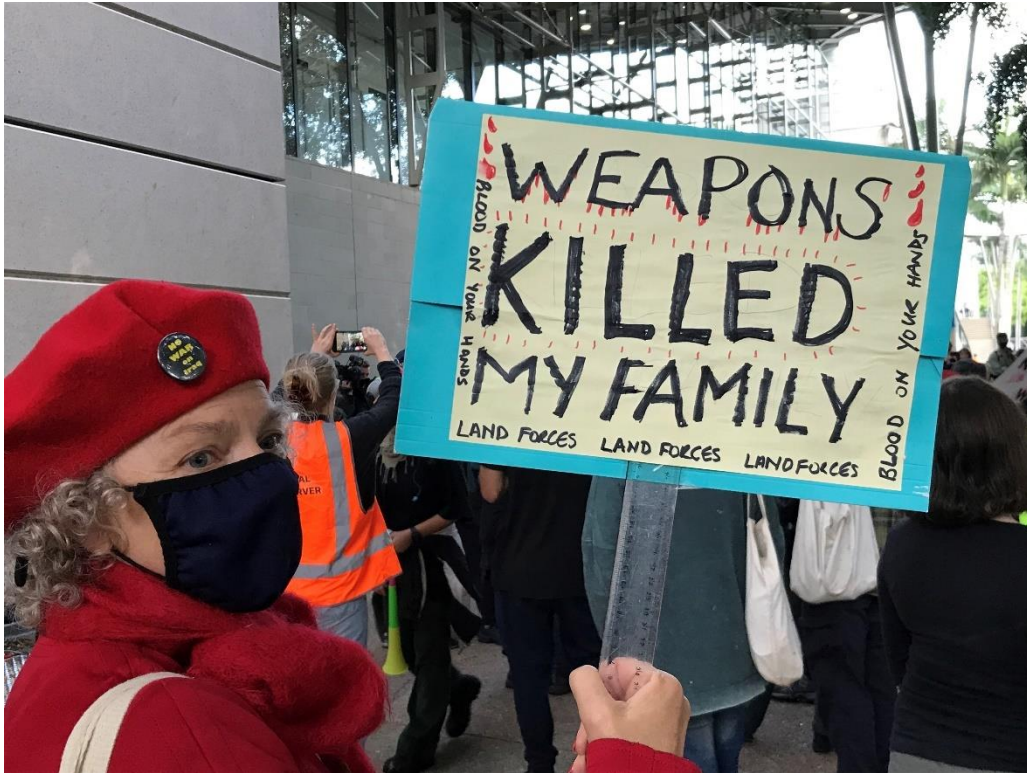
Turns out “the world we hold in our hearts” is much closer than we think. We caught a glimpse of it during the Disrupt festival. It is magnificent.



Kids and nanas, united af

BE REAL

When I campaign I try to speak and write like a person not like an organization. The disembodied, semi-formal style of most NGOs often fails to connect with people. There is a formula NGOs follow in their communications, based, no doubt, on solid research. The result is that 'they all sound the same'. They sound like organizations, not people. At Disrupt Land Forces we tried to write and speak from the integrity of our hearts, as whole human beings. We know that our 'voice' was heard and felt beyond the usual activist circles. We did not run our comms through a 'professional campaigner' filter. Our voices were (still are!) real.



This survivor of war held her truth in the faces of the weapons makers for 8 hours straight. As real as it gets and possibly the most powerful placard-holding we have ever seen.

FIND YOUR CONNECTION

We all have a connection to militarism. We all have a connection to everything. Finding our connection to an issue brings clarity, conviction and integrity to our position. On the first night of Disrupt we asked people to form pairs and tell each other the story of how militarism has impacted their families. One, two, at most three generations back there is profound harm. Acknowledging this impact brings awareness to our personal stake in dismantling the war machine. At the same time we foster unity, because we all have a war story. Finding our personal or emotional connection to an issue empowers us to speak authentically, from our hearts.

"It was really powerful foregrounding the ways militarism impacted everyone. We were able to reach all these different sectors and cohorts of activism. All the links to other movements and peoples, connections with Palestine, West Papua, smashing patriarchy, the environment, made it really inclusive. Like, we could see how we are all connected to this issue."



PRACTICE ACTIVE SOLIDARITY

Many movements I have been part of have fretted over the question: “How can we get more people of colour / First Nations people involved in the campaign?” (See above paragraph on using an inclusive ‘we’.) The question is the wrong way around. To act in solidarity is to learn what the hot issues are for a community and work from an authentic place of connection/intersection with that community towards shared goals.

The more we work intersectionally, the more connections, trust and good will we build, the better for all of us.

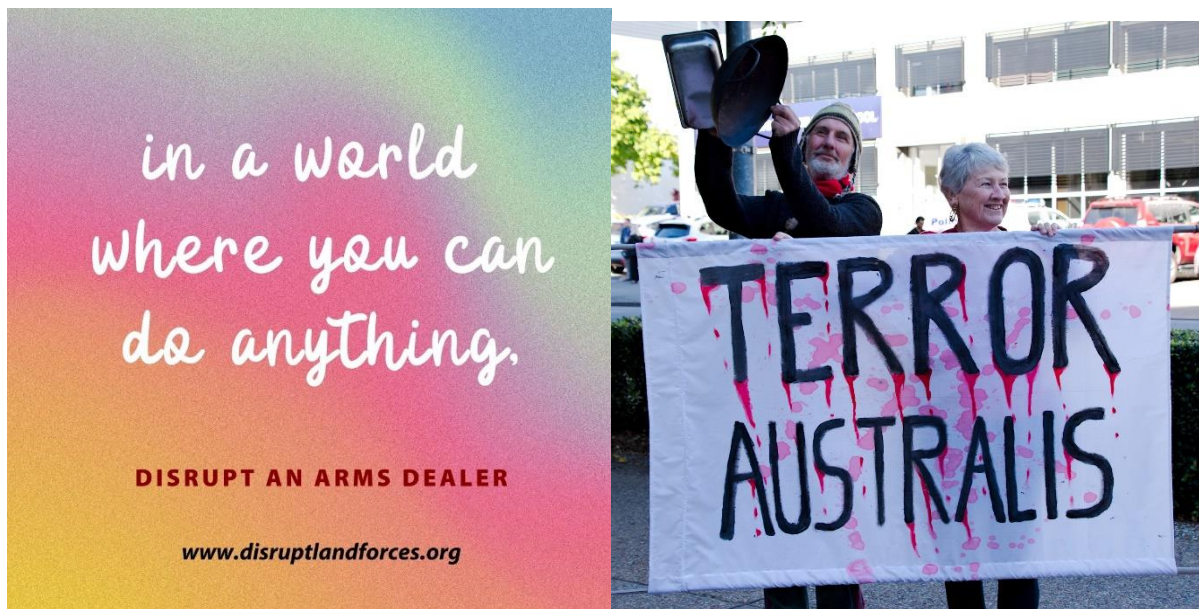
The core organizers actively sought opportunities to act in solidarity with our allies across human rights and earth rights movements during the campaign period, and for many years prior. We turned up, we volunteered, we blockaded and picketed and donated and marched. Protecting forests and sacred springs from extractivism, demanding kids and refugees be released from detention, protesting sexual violence and white supremacy — we were there. We were there because militarism intersects with racism, patriarchy, dispossession and earth destruction. We were there because that's where our hearts lie. Our solidarity has been expressed in words and also in action over decades. Our background of intersectional movement engagement meant that our networks were diverse and our 'street cred' was strong. Because it feels good and it is good, we highly recommend practicing active solidarity.



BUILD MOMENTUM THROUGH ACTION

For six months before Disrupt we ran small actions to build momentum for the Festival. We had identified five weapons companies as campaign targets, based on two criteria: i. weapons sold by the company were being used in West Papua and ii. the company was expanding its footprint in Australia. We organized several small, disruptive actions at the offices and factories of Boeing, Thales, Elbit, Rheinmetall and EOS (an Australian weapons maker), publicizing their connections with war crimes and demonstrating possibilities for direct action. These actions consolidated our core groups and built trust, skills and commitment. Research we did into these companies and discussions with friends in West Papua shaped our discourse and narrative during Disrupt Land Forces. We disrupted the arms dealers and we told a story.

CELEBRATE RESISTANCE, GROW SOLIDARITY



The war machine and the arms trade are unspeakably evil and depressing as all get out. Coming together in resistance and acting in solidarity, on the other hand, are joyful. Our digital resources include analysis and research about the organized murder of war. At the same time, our communications celebrated resistance and encouraged solidarity.

CALL IT A FESTIVAL

With two weeks to go, I looked at the actions, workshops and elements we had assembled and spontaneously decided to call Disrupt a Festival of Resistance. (I'm lucky I have a very flexible crew in my COG!) I blitzed our social channels with the news that it's gonna be huge. Speaking about Disrupt as a Festival, a big, daring initiative of creative acts of resistance, lifted the interest and support to a whole new level.

The pumping dance tune [Jangan Bunuh Kami Lagi](#) (Stop Killing Us) became the soundtrack to our [videos](#) and to the Festival itself, setting the pace.

A series of rainbow hued and brightly coloured graphics supported the idea of Festival.

We highly recommend this strategy.



When negotiating with police about a planned protest I always ask them not to bring weapons. We don't like that sort of thing. Somebody might get hurt.

HAND IT OVER

The handover was magnificent. We loved the handover.

A couple of weeks before Disrupt I handed over all the media management to Andy, Jarrah and Cate. It was so good to be able to completely surrender all of that work to other crew and be free to focus on other parts of the campaign. This total handover was possible because the new media team had all the skills and resources they needed. I handed over access to all our platforms, all our content and all our digital collateral and I didn't have to think about it again. It was fantastic.

"All the media stuff that was prepared helped heaps. I could feel confident to take that role on because I was able to get across all the info. It was awesome handling the media for the tank action and watching it blow up."

We handed over the kitchen, site logistics, audio management, legal training and observation, first aid and street medics and watchhouse support. This meant that the core organizers were able to participate in meetings, actions, art events and even get arrested without the organization of the Festival falling apart. We wish we had handed over more.

WHY DISRUPT?

Short term campaign goals

- Create discomfort for participants at Land Forces 21
- Make it unattractive to attend or hold arms fairs in Australia
- Hold space for frontline affected communities to speak

Long term campaign goals

- Develop a broad based coalition for #disarmament
 - Together, identify ongoing campaign targets
- Run a series of winnable campaigns against arms dealers

DISRUPT how?

Any way we can, with **zero harm to living beings**

- Sound, sight, smell
- Movement and music
- Non violent direct action
- Projection art
- Your ideas?

Frontline affected voices to the front

Safe spaces = be respectful with each other

3. Tending the garden

SAFE AND HAPPY

People do best when they feel safe and happy. In setting up and running the campaign, our primary goal was to create a space where people felt safe and happy, a 'community of care'. We wanted people to feel secure enough to try new things, take risks, think creatively and enjoy being together. As such, a focus on caring for self and others was present in our pre-campaign messaging, our meetings, communications and in our handbook. We invited skilled nonviolence practitioners to join our 'community care

team', who would manage any care needs in alignment with a thorough safer spaces 'policy'. There was a phone number people could call if they felt unsafe or unhappy and needed support. No-one ever called the number. Over three hundred people over seven days, living, eating and taking direct action together, managed to deal with whatever arose without extra support from our care team. This is a testament to the people who came to Disrupt Land Forces, who demonstrated extraordinary resourcefulness, stamina and altruism. It is also the result of a substantive effort by the organizers to foreground people's physical and emotional well-being in all that we did. Below are some of the things we did to enhance safety and happiness.

"Having the safety of community made it easy for people to have fun."



Even the tweenager is almost smiling

ZERO HARM AND RADICAL RESPECT

We had only 2 rules for Festival participants. Both were aimed at maximum safety and happiness for the people. From our handbook:

Agreement for Collaboration

We ask that everyone joining Disrupt Land Forces commits to:

- 1. Respectful language and behaviour with each other**
- 2. Actions are nonviolent = we do not harm other living beings.**

Our rules were backed up by a safer spaces policy that detailed who to contact and how you could be cared for if in need. The bottom line was that harming others could see you excluded. The top line was that we would do our best to look after everyone.

We elaborated on both rules, to ensure they were crystal clear 😊

Rule 2. We clarified that 'harm' meant physical harm. We wanted to avoid discussions of whether other peoples' tactics might present 'emotional' harm to the war mongers.

Rule 1. We asked for respectful behaviour 'with each other' quite deliberately. Again, we wanted to avoid any pressure for people to be respectful towards the war mongers or the police.

We asked for a greatly expanded concept of respect, which I called 'Radical Respect'. We wanted to avoid discussion of other peoples' tactics in general. We hoped that a 'live and let protest' ethic might enable people to focus on their own tactics to disrupt the military industrial death machine. We hoped to avoid the long, heated discussions about tactics that often suck up activists' energy at blockades. We wanted people to feel free to protest in any way that felt meaningful to them, without fear of judgement or censure or ridicule from their peers. We asked people to sit with any discomfort they experienced due to other people's tactics and not attempt to impose limits on each other. We asked for self-control, rather than control of others. In practice, this 'live and let protest' was not easy. Everyone was discomfited or estranged or bewildered at least once. But it worked. We maintained unity and care for each other. People tried to understand rather than control each other's protest styles. Nobody argued about 'the right way' to protest. We stayed together.



Josh and the ghouls at The Dinner of Death parade. Theatrical and disruptive

This is how I wrote up the Radical Respect philosophy in our handbook:

Practice Radical Respect

We do not seek to limit or control the ways people express themselves in protest at Disrupt Land Forces (other than the 'no harm' agreement). We ask that you extend radical respect to each other, offering kindness, compassion and support to other activists even and especially when you do not understand the way they express themselves. Some people at Disrupt will use prayer. Some might be naked. Some folks will swear. Some might throw flowers or hold art interventions. You will not relate to all of the ways that people express themselves here. Let that be ok with you. There is no right way to protest.

No right way

If there was a right way to protest that was guaranteed to succeed we would have worked that out by now. We would have fixed everything and we wouldn't have to protest any more. The Disrupt Land Forces crew has created an abundant space for protest. We invite you all to fill that space with whatever style of protest feels meaningful to you. Try stuff out. There's no wrong way. This is an experiment in creative social change. Go for it.

Is it counterproductive?

It is counterproductive to not turn up. It is counterproductive to publicly disrespect other activists to the media or on social media. It is counterproductive to spend hours agonising over the right way to take action.

United AF

Things might get stressful at times. Other times will be elating. Whatever happens, hold fast to what unites us. We are in active solidarity with climate, peace and justice movements in Colombia, Canada, Germany, Mexico, Myanmar, Aotearoa, Indonesia, the UK, Palestine, East Timor, Korea and West Papua to resist the military industrial death machine, because we love our planet and her peoples. United AF.

"I appreciated that tactics were not prescriptive. Everyone was encouraged to respect different beliefs without it becoming a conflict. We could be autonomous and do actions with our affinity group."

"It felt like the campaign was able to embrace every effort, every philosophical position."

"I liked that we had a diverse range of tactics and everybody got along. I liked that people stayed after they delivered their own tactics to support other peoples' actions."



War Crimes start here: Indi and Wenzel on a Ripley cannon

PRIORITISE HAVING FUN

"IT WAS FUN! Being continually around others there were loads of fun moments, it was not just a protest it was a massive social event."

At every stage of the campaign, we welcomed humour, creativity and connection. We become activists because humans are doing terrible things to each other and the world. The things we are struggling against are awful and depressing. Our experience in the realm of activism can be an antidote to this misery if we allow it to be fun. My experiences with activists in Latin America, Africa and the Mediterranean showed me that activism can be joyful. Experiencing collective joy connects us to something beyond the horror of the abusive present. Joy enables us to glimpse the reality we are reaching for – harmonious and healing. In all our activism, let there be fun.

"The tank action was a highlight for me. I thought the messaging was effective. 'Crapitalism' grabbed the essence, it was like uncovering bullshit. So slick. And it worked. The whole thing was inspiring. The parade with the riff raff band, disrupting the [Land Forces] drinks was fun."



Twenty of us joined the 'storm the arms fair' Rheinmetall tank action

"WE GOT IN! Year and years of repression were overcome in that moment. It felt like kicking the giant in the shins, my inner child standing up to the industrial death machine. I still experience joy, a complete change of mood, every time I repeat that phrase 'We got in.'"

CENTRE ART AND CULTURE

The centring of art and culture in activism is widely practiced by First Nations peoples and across Oceania, Latin America and Africa. Activists often work with ceremonial dress, music, images and ritual to express cultural identity as fundamental to our resistance. Song, dance and costume are also used to uplift and to encourage play. In industrialised nations, a distinguishing feature of Extinction Rebellion has been the central role of the arts. Disrupt Land Forces has learnt from all of the above. Artistic and cultural expression generate bonds between us and assert creativity in the face of destruction. We invited artists to disrupt the war machine and encouraged activists to be artful.

"I loved the use of art works such as songs, music, memorial placards and sculptures in the actions. People are spiritually and emotionally connected through the artwork and the actions are more meaningful."

"Communication of the messaging through art was very effective".

Centring art and culture makes activism more powerful, beautiful, accessible and fun.



Sheer elder power: Mim dancing through grief, rage and hope at the barricade

HAVE A HALL

If you possibly can, have a hall!

In an urban setting, having a hall — in a park — was just incredibly good. Having a safe space in which to eat, gather, plan, celebrate, grieve, laugh, meet and connect was invaluable. If you ever run a decentralized, intersectional direct action campaign, we can't stress enough how great it is to have a safe space for the people. If you don't have much money (who does?) we suggest you make having a hall a top priority.

"Having the hall enabled us to develop a sense of community. It provided space for relationships. The kitchen, the concert, the daily check ins, having the hall was so important."

"Having the hall meant that people were spending time together outside of meetings or actions. It supported trust building."

"I really liked having the time to get to know each other, to build trust, hear each other, hear each other's stories, having the time and space to build understanding."

"The hall had a really good vibe, accessible, it was pleasant to be in, meaning that people stayed around, and that made more meetings and planning possible."



Carole and Connor, Jagera Hall

CROWDSOURCE ACTIONS

We crowdsourced many of our tactics, both before and during the Festival. On the first day of gathering we held a tactics brainstorm session and wrote all the suggestions up on a white board. We had already gathered a substantial amount of protest resources. The white board remained in the space for the week. We then had a range of tactics people could try and the resources required to do them.

"There was this smorgasbord of ideas and activities that people could plug into. I loved the plug-in aspect, the chance to do as little or as much as you wished."



The cardboard tank was Izzy's idea, Naomi (on the right) brought it and Lenny (left) wore it. Josh wore it a lot too.

SHOW LOVE

Yes, actual love. As with joy, love transcends the here and now and opens doors to the future we want to see. We are in the struggle because we feel love, for our planet and for each other. At Disrupt Land Forces we tried to bring that sense or that feeling into focus, to speak of love out loud, because this is what can uplift and connect us. Love and rage are two key motivators for activists. Rage might bring you to the blockade, but love is what makes you want to stay. In word, gesture and action, we were constantly expressing love.



Franz receiving love on the barricade – blurry but beautiful

The expression of love is a radical act in a world dominant system of individuation, competition, mutual suspicion and the quasi-mechanical construction of the human as 'worker'. Colonialism smashed organic communities with love-based economies and is smashing still. Capitalism successfully coopted much of Western counterculture and denigrated what it could not co-opt, such as the recovery of peace and love as primary values. My focus on love and expressing love is a personal-political rebellion against the military industrial death machine. I am substantially inspired by the work of African-American feminists, especially bell hooks. More recently I have been following the work of Patrisse Cullors-Brignac and of Valerie Kaur, who says "Revolutionary love is the call of our age". Hells yeah.

BE OPEN

At times, activists at Disrupt Land Forces held small, phone-free meetings to plan potentially law-breaking actions. A small number of activities were run on a 'need to

know' basis. Apart from these affinity group and small group sessions, everything was open to everyone. Our principles and values, our strategic goals, our plans, work teams, resources and spaces were accessible to anyone at any time. Openness helps develop trust and feelings of equality, which create safety.

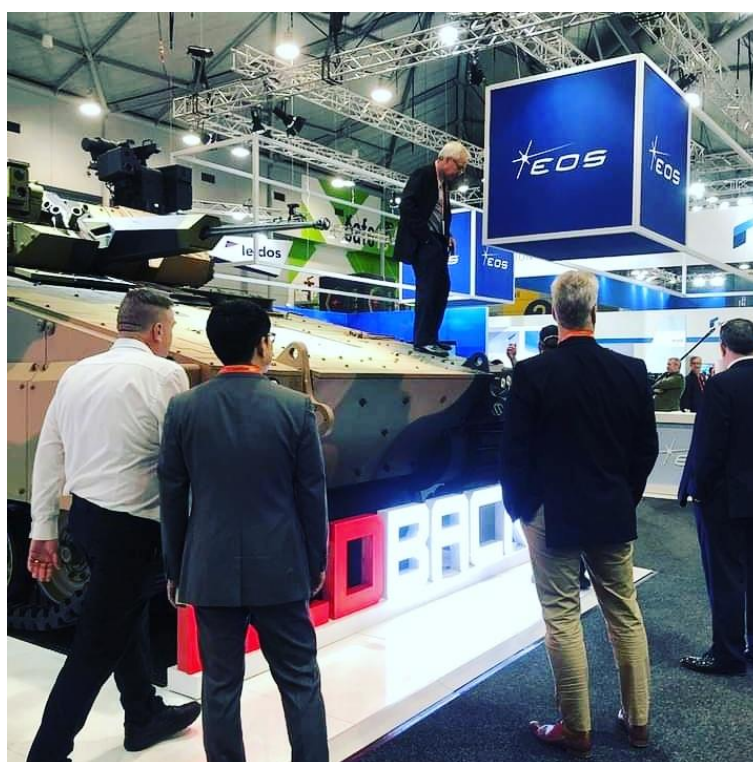
"Trust developed quickly and I think that was due to the organizers' humility and lack of ego. Ego causes suspicion. Instead, people entered the space willing to extend hospitality and generosity. We've all failed before in our movements. We were able to acknowledge how we were standing on those failures. Our humility enabled us to experiment and accept that we might fail. Having strategists, who can think through safety, mitigate risk and then do it anyway."

DIY TO THE MAX

The opening line of our handbook invited people to DIY everything.

This is a DIY Festival

If you see something that needs doing, please do it. Get help if you need it. If something is broken or not working well, please help us fix it. A huge team labour of love is running this festival. Pitch in with love, generosity and kindness. We DIY love that.



Julian doing a DIY action on a Hanwha tank

BE FLEXIBLE & SAY YES

Too many times have we seen NGOs describe themselves as agile or nimble yet when someone proposes something that's not in the program they find that 'the program has already been set'. Setting up a program in advance makes organizing easier, but this lack of flexibility often ends up excluding people who may not have been in on the organizing process. All too often people from marginalized communities, or who are

new to movements, find that speaking positions, tactics, imagery, messaging, everything has been determined already. The result is exclusion from key channels of expression and input.

We aimed to say yes to everything. Can I speak on the mic? Can I use this banner? Can we post this image? Can we hold a vigil tonight? Can I join the media team? Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. We had our rules — zero harm and practice respect — outlined in our handbook and at our gatherings. Beyond those, we tried to remain flexible and open to whatever ideas and initiatives emerged. By the second day, the flexibility afforded by our decentralized and autonomous organizing model meant that no-one even asked us anymore, they just DIYd.

“It was great being so empowered to act autonomously. The mood was set right from the start: don’t hurt other living beings and run free. Then people took on organizing with affinity groups. This was very effective.”

The flexibility extended to actions and tactics evolving on the fly.

“I loved how flexible and agile people were. People used what info was coming in to adapt to the situation. For instance, the tanks did not arrive when we thought. None of our plans went perfect... Being flexible is better for disruption because it means you can prioritize safety and also take opportunities that arise. For example, on the first day when our rally was at entrance 3 and we realized the war makers were getting in via other entrances, we spread out and covered the whole flank. Some of the rally stayed at entrance 3, the Quaker grannies blockaded entrance 2 and the rest of us covered the main entrance [entrance 1]. That was awesome.”



Steffi speaking truth to the war mongers, main entrance

LEAVE SPACE

At Disrupt Land Forces we left a LOT of space for ‘contingencies’: unprogrammed workshops, performers, actions, speakers. In fact, we left three whole days, the days of the Expo from 1-3 June, almost entirely unprogrammed. We saw our job as providing intellectual and material resources and opening a space for protest. We then invited people to fill that space with creative and disruptive actions.

We had planned activities for the Friday launch, with a First Nations fire and storytelling. We had planned a full day of workshops and a concert for Saturday. Sunday and Monday we had planned actions out at arms dealers’ factories around Brisbane. We had planned to try to jump on top of any large weapons as they were delivered to the venue — we succeeded twice! We had invited friends from climate groups to organize a disruptive parade on the Wednesday evening, the second day of the Land Forces Expo.



Dinner of Death parade, featuring wraiths, a plague doctor and the riff raff radical marching band

We left the actual days of the expo empty, unprogrammed. With 2 weeks to go, people were asking us ‘So what’s happening? What are we doing?’

Structure vs freedom

People came in and occupied the space of protest in myriad, beautiful ways. People self-organized, either with existing affinity groups or through new collaborations, and carried out a range of both traditional and experimental tactics. The total lack of structure was enabling in some ways, however we found it was limiting in others. Looking back, we identified that some of our resources were under-used. Some of the tactics we had brainstormed together were never deployed. Given the number of people we had gathered, many small group initiatives would have been possible as well as a few more whole group actions.

Solutions?

When folks started to ask us what was planned, we decided to give each day of the Expo a theme, to provide at least a basis for improvisation. Day 1 was From the Frontlines, holding space for people from war impacted communities to lead and direct. Day 2 was Climate Day, focused on the connections between militarism, dispossession, fossil fuels, deforestation and ecocide. Day 3 was Smash the Patriarchy, calling out the toxic masculinity at the heart of militarism. The themes empowered specific groups and individuals to step up, speak out and act. In retrospect, however, a little more structure might have enabled more involvement and more disruption.

"We could have had more sneak attacks – more small group actions. With so much experience among us we could have done more disruptions."

How can we remain decentralized and make best use of our people power?

Some of the strategies we have considered are:

- i. Form tactics teams; a mini team (3-5 people) who take responsibility for coordinating or initiating a particular tactic. Have several of these, or as many as needed. The Climate Angels and the Wraiths, for instance, used this model, as did the Dinner of Death parade coordinators.
- ii. Identify more ways to deploy in small groups, on a series of minor missions.
- iii. Provide action templates. Design actions suitable for 3, 4 or 5 people and make these available for people to pick up and use.
- iv. Have more coordinators.
- v. Have a couple of action coordinators for each day, whose only job is to coordinate actions or tactics teams

RECOGNIZE, VALUE AND INCLUDE EVERYONE

"I appreciated the openness that was shown to community members. Everyone was open to working with everyone, there were no cliques. There was a sense that everyone was welcome, including people new to activism. For example, I was able to participate in the tank action even though I didn't know any of the other people. I was made to feel welcome and included in everything."

We asked people at Disrupt to recognize, value and include everyone. We tried to greet every person and make them welcome, to find out about them and offer them ways to participate. We asked people to make an effort to include people who might not know

anyone, especially if that person looks different from you, is from a different culture or subculture. Sometimes people who are older, especially older women, find we are not valued. Sometimes people who look 'straight' or conventional find ourselves excluded in activist spaces. People of colour can experience being either feared or fetishized. People who are gender non-conforming find we are often avoided. We didn't want any of that to happen. We didn't have to worry. There was such a diversity of ages and cultures and genders that no-one 'stood out' as being 'different'. We were all different. A culture of curiosity, generosity and warmth was quick to develop and became self-sustaining. It was beautiful.

"There was a really welcoming culture in the space. As someone new coming into that space for the first time, all the way thru to the legal support since then, people were very warm. I think the decentralized nature, worked really well with all the different groups. It gives me confidence to engage in further actions with all of you."



Staunch and happy: senior women at the barricade

EAT TOGETHER, ACT TOGETHER, DANCE TOGETHER



Eat together, act together, dance together. It's self-explanatory.

DIVERSITY MAKES PEOPLE HAPPY

I don't think any of us were aware of how happy the diversity would make us feel. People mentioned this again and again as a highlight of their experience.

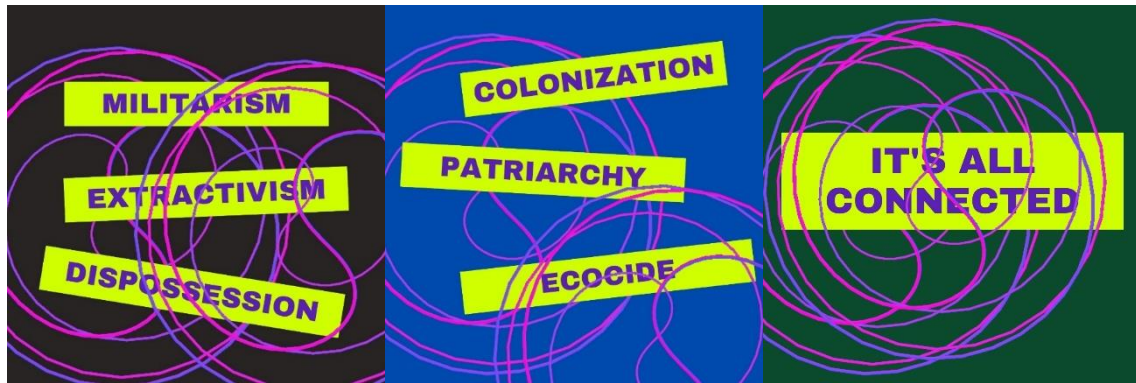
"It was really different culturally from what usually happens. I felt totally safe for the first time in an activist space, having a space where there was actual cultural diversity, not just cultural but age, faith, ethnicity ... Having elders was really special. To have everyone from babies to elders made it a really nurturing space."

People clearly thrive in spaces that are intercultural, intergenerational, gender diverse, equitable and united for peace.

WE ARE ALL CONNECTED

There are no single issues. Poverty, white supremacy, misogyny, extinction, militarism – they are all connected. So are we. Through every phase of the campaign we tried to make the links between the arms trade, repression and exploitation visible. For example, when highlighting resistance to extractivism in West Papua or Amazonia, we can see how the climate crisis is in direct relationship with the dispossession of First Nations peoples, and how toxic masculinity, racism, capitalism, authoritarianism and the arms trade all support the violence of dispossession. The antidote to this interconnected violence is us. Exposing the links between violence against women,

people of colour, First Nations peoples, refugees, the poor, the non-compliant and against our planet strengthens our bonds as people who resist. We are all connected.



4. Harvest

The fruit of all these labours was an intersectional, decentralized direct action campaign that kicked arse and was also the most fun we've ever had.

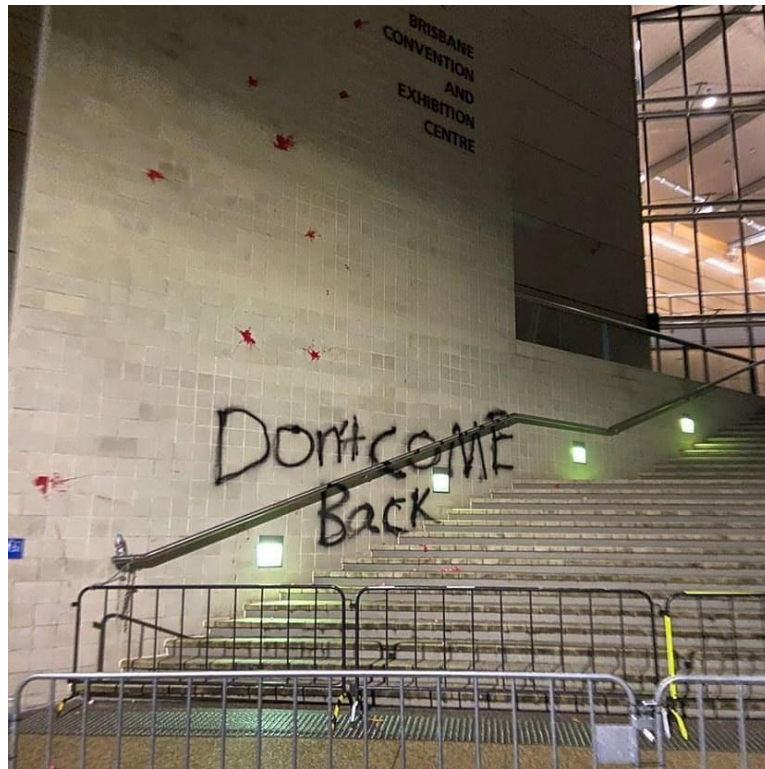
Some of the tactics and actions that we rolled out are:

- Tank Block Action (Rheinmetall and Ripley)
- Trail of Blood Action (Rheinmetall and DB Schenker)
- Truck Block Action (Sensitive Cargo)
- Factory block (Thales)
- Lament (Boeing)
- Speeches (Skyborne and Nioa)
- Rally
- Quaker Granny Blockade on day 1
- Cacophony – Vuvuzelas & Cacerolazo
- Butoh – The Haunting
- Sit In (Uncle Kev and Uncle Coco: “I want to buy a gun”)
- Ode to the God of Wealth (poetry)
- Say Their Names (vigil for Palestinian children)
- Quakers 24 hour vigil on day 2
- Bleeding Climate Angels
- Dinner of Death Parade
- Picket of the Expo drinks session
- Sugar Glider / Citizen’s Arrest
- Dancing in the street
- Wall of song
- Storming the arms fair – Rheinmetall action
- Bad ballet
- Blood spills everywhere
- Farty spray
- Raw prawns
- Banners
- Placards
- Chanting
- Song
- Dancing around the tanks
- Pickets
- Graffiti
- Yelling at the war makers
- Loud music
- Whirly things
- Climbing on tanks
- Rape whistles
- Personal alarms
- Projection art
- Candles

For even more photos of Disrupt Land Forces, check us out on Instagram or Facebook @disruptlandforces or head here: [our gallery](#)

Zelda K J Grimshaw

Reflecting the experience of Zelda, Margie Pestorius and the whole Disrupt Land Forces crew.



Our final words on the subject of arms fairs