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14 Investigating tactics

The world seems to be made up of countries, and each one has a government. Most people think about the world in terms of countries and governments—it seems natural, and it’s a convenient way to make sense of the news and much everyday discussion. In addition, many people identify with a particular country.

This way of seeing the world, while useful for some purposes, can be misleading. Countries and governments are not the same as the people in them. Furthermore, governments often act contrary to the interests of the population, instead serving the interests of those with the most wealth and power.

What I call “ruling tactics,” which might also be called “patriotism tactics,” are methods used to encourage people to think in terms of countries and to identify with a particular one, and not to question in any fundamental way how wealth and power are distributed. To illustrate these tactics, I’ve chosen a variety of issues such as sport and terrorism. I picked these particular examples because I know something about them and they are addressed in everyday conversations. However, my assessments are far from definitive. Much more could be done to examine tactics in relation to any given topic, and to tackle additional topics. If you want to do this, how should you proceed?

Consider a topic such as the economy, transport or the arts. Concerning this topic, a useful first step is to ask whether there is any plausible reason for people to identify with a country. (See chapter 2.) Does the average person really have much in common with thousands or millions of others who will never be friends or even be introduced, just because they are resident in the same area of land? For example, it might sound beneficial that the economy has grown, but looking more closely it could be that nearly all the increased income has gone to the top 1% of earners: not everyone has the same stake in *our* economy, namely the country's economy. If you're one of the wealthy ones, fine, but otherwise thinking in terms of *our* economy is misleading. It's even more misleading if you take into account people in Bangladesh, Malawi and Peru.

The next step is to look at the common types of tactics used by rulers and their supporters to gain support for the system. As listed in the introduction, five tactics are commonly used in relation to the system (the country, the nation, the government).

System-support tactics

1. Exposure (of positives); attention
2. Valuing
3. Positive interpretation
4. Endorsement
5. Rewards

So you look for evidence of any of these tactics, for example in the media, government policies or everyday conversations. For example, what sorts of comments are

there are about economic growth, especially of *our* economy? If growth is mentioned, that's exposure. If it's seen as a good thing, that's valuing—and so forth.

After looking at tactics to encourage support for the system, you can look at tactics to oppose challenges and alternatives. To do this, you might need to learn more about a particular alternative or campaign, such as the Occupy movement, the global justice movement or the steady-state economy. Then you look for evidence about tactics against this alternative or campaign. The five tactics listed in chapter 1, regularly used against challenges to the dominant view, are

System-support tactics: opposing challenges and alternatives

1. Cover-up
2. Devaluing
3. Negative interpretation
4. Discrediting endorsements
5. Intimidation

For example, you might notice that there is little or no discussion of steady-state economics—it is covered up—or that when it is discussed, it is criticised or dismissed as irrelevant or foolish.

Some of these techniques are more visible than others, depending on the topic. Some alternatives are hardly ever discussed: cover-up is so effective that other techniques are not required. In relation to conventional economics, Gandhian economics is one such alternative. However, some economic alternatives occasionally obtain

visibility, for example local currencies, the Tobin tax or a guaranteed annual income, in which case you need to examine the way they are treated by various commentators and spokespeople. Evidence of devaluation and reinterpretation can come from what people say and write. Evidence of intimidation can sometimes be hard to obtain: it is hidden. Local currencies have sometimes been shut down by governments, but this is not widely known.

If you're involved in a campaign to challenge dominant perspectives and promote alternatives, then you can go on to challenger tactics.

Opposing system-support tactics

1. Exposure (of negatives)
2. Devaluing
3. Negative interpretation
4. Discrediting endorsements
5. Refusing rewards

Promoting alternatives

1. Exposure
2. Valuing
3. Positive interpretation
4. Endorsement
5. Rewards

These tactics provide a rough framework for thinking through how to proceed and in particular for seeing whether there are actions that might be taken. For example, if you are involved in promoting local currencies, you can oppose the tactics by rulers by exposing the

negative consequences of the conventional money system, devaluing it, explaining what is wrong with it, and so forth. You can promote the alternative by publicising and valuing it, and so on.

These are big topics, and no one can do everything. To become deeply involved in just one issue such as local currencies can become a life's work and, depending on the individual, it can be worthwhile putting most effort into one or two tactics, for example explaining the alternative to wider audiences or trying to implement it in a particular area.

Another possibility is to look at what's being done already and seeing whether there are any significant gaps, namely worthwhile tasks that are being neglected. This could be an opportunity to make a difference.

It is helpful to remember that countries, borders and states are human creations. They are all fairly new, and are neither inevitable nor necessary aspects of the way humans organise themselves. The fact that so many people spend so much effort encouraging everyone to think in terms of countries and governments indicates that this perspective does not come naturally. There are strong contrary pressures to think locally and globally. System-support tactics are just tactics, not guaranteed to succeed. Understanding them makes it easier to resist them more effectively.