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## TACTICS FOR INTERVIEWING PUBLIC FIGURES AT HIGH PROFILE EVENTS

### Purpose

This is meant as a training manual for members of the independent media who've not had the opportunity to attend high profile events or interview high profile public figures.

### The Advantages of Independent Media

Even if corporate media was not owned outright by the corporations it "reported" on, it would be at a tremendous disadvantage. The fact that they are confined to sound bites, and must keep up an advertising base as a bottom line, limits their ability to get at the truth. As a result, members of the independent media who can get to interview or ask questions to the major players frequently find themselves in a position where they are the only ones asking real questions.

### Getting Into the Event

It is generally not that hard to get a press pass to an event. There are two things to remember. The first is that these people have to screen literally hundreds, often thousands of people, hence they are not going to be looking at any one too closely. The trick is to frame who you are in such a way that you won't arouse suspicion. You can learn a lot from the many animals that practice camouflage and mimicry in order to blend in and attract minimal amounts of attention. Members of the working press generally dress in neat street clothes, hence, so should you. Also consider the name of the organization you're affiliating with; Something like The Independent is less likely to raise hackles than say The Left Handed Vegetarian Marxist Bakunin Truth.

The other thing to remember is that you have a right to be there. If you are told you can't be admitted, try to get them to reconsider. Find out why they haven't let you in, and try to change their perceptions. Supply materials that show them you are credible, e.g. you have been around for awhile, you are seen by a wide audience, you represent a particular group, etc. Don't be afraid to move up the chain of command. The trick is to remain credible while you're doing this.

### A Press Pass for Your Organization

Having a Press Pass is a must. It can gain you access to all kinds of doors. It can also provide you another layer of protection against law enforcement officers. Putting together a press pass is actually pretty simple. All it really is is a piece of official looking laminated plastic with the particulars of your organization, such as address, contact information, a small photo, and a signature.

### Likely Scenarios for the Event

#### Scenario 1

The most probable scenario is that even if you gain admittance, most of the event will be closed off to the press and public. Typically if there is press inside these sessions, it's usually limited to one camera or camera crew that provides a feed to the other media. The rest of the media are left in an enormous cavern like space where they stare at the canned feed on a t.v. monitor and drink coffee. They do occasional live remotes discussing what they've seen on the televisions providing the feeds, somehow managing to speak in an excited voice.

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### Options in this Scenario

You'll find you're surrounded by some of the most recognizable figures in the corporate media world. Of course most of these figures haven't done a decent job reporting on what you're there to cover, and they're standing around and you're standing around, so interviewing them seems a natural. A good tack is to politely ask for the interview, preferably with a video camera or tape recorder running. See the interview techniques session below.

### Scenario 2

A slightly more favorable scenario is that they will allow limited access to the event. This means that certain press is allowed in as observers. Usually the spaces are limited, and usually the largest media outlets, will be let in first.

### Options in this Scenario

Most of the larger press clears out after the main figures have made their sound bites. In this case it is useful to identify the person or persons with the ability to let you in and use persistence to get in. Turn your recording instrument on as soon as you can. Making a record of what is going on can be invaluable. In these sorts of events the decisions tend to be made, after the most visible figures and the scrutiny has gone away. Frequently independent media winds up with a better record of what went on than the people running the event did.

### Scenario 3

You get in and have complete access.

### Options in this Scenario

Usually if you get in and have complete access, those there will assume that you belong there, at least until you give them a reason to think otherwise. You could in this case, consider yourself a spy and just begin gathering as much information as you can for later redistribution. Sometimes if you act really friendly and supportive, you'll be surprised what information they give you. For example the producers of a recent documentary highly critical of US military intervention received some amazing footage just by telling the Department of Defense how much they loved what they were doing.

### Press Conferences

Throughout the event there are likely to be canned press "opportunities." These involve one, or a few representatives being placed in a room with the press. Usually these run fifteen minutes to half an hour. The person or persons will make a statement. This will be followed by an opportunity to ask questions.

### Panel Discussions

Occasionally there are events where members of both sides are "brought together." Most of these are arranged to promote the appearance of debate, while providing a safety net for the participants. Questions are often filtered through a moderator. Participants are discouraged from actively questioning each other. Your role in these cases can be to see that the bureaucrats do not receive a free ride. Ask the person representing your side what they thought of a statement that they weren't given an opportunity to answer.

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### Impromptu Interviews

There will be opportunities where the people running the show will give talks, press conferences, or you may just catch one of them in the elevator, though organizers will do their best to prevent these from occurring.

### Indy Interview Techniques

Objectives During an Encounter - Your principle objective is to walk out with something you can use.

If you feel that there's something heavy going on, sometimes the best thing is to blend in, be a fly on the wall, make as comprehensive a record as you can, and hope they forget you're there. You'd be amazed what the ruling class says when it thinks it's alone. If you're personable and approach them individually, you might be surprised what information they give you.

On other occasions, especially if you have a means of recording the encounter, it can be useful to expose them as the liars and thieves that they are.

### Overview of the Opposition

Coming face to face with major public figures can be a heady experience. Even if you despise everything they stand for, asking a person of power a question, can make the most hardened activist ill at ease. If you find yourself a little overwhelmed and groping for a question, it is helpful to consider that the vast majority of people in high administrative positions are:

- Ill-informed and spread thin
- Too busy to have actually written the speeches they give
- Inexperienced at answering real questions

A chance to interview these people can be a real treat. Most of them are used to a docile press that either won't or can't effectively bring up real issues. By using a few well-directed questions, with follow-up, you'll find it's quite easy to dominate one of these encounters.

### Tips

KISS - Also known as Keep It Simple Stupid. Stick to a fundamental point. The less ambiguity, the better.

Use What They Give You - Learn to utilize the fundamentals of judo, using your opponents attack against them, to work with what your bureaucrat gives you. If the bureaucrat is making a presentation, jot down the main points they make. A frequent tack they take is to outline the horrific tactics taken by their opposition. Frequently this is something that they themselves practice:

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*Example: The leader of an "anti-cult" group that had advised the FBI on its paramilitary action in Waco Texas, gave a public address where he described the fundamentals of cults. One of these fundamentals was only allowing questions from a pre-selected group. The Speaker then opened up for questions, but only, from a pre selected portion of the group.*

*Reporter: Excuse me for cutting in, but I feel a little chagrined. You mentioned that one of the fundamentals of these cults is that they conduct sessions where only a select few are allowed to ask questions. It almost seems like that's what you're doing here. Could you open yourself up for questions from the rest of us now?*

*Anti-Cult Leader: Well, now we've heard from the Church of Scientology*

*Reporter: Actually, I'm a reporter. You've just utilized another criteria you described for the cults: Marginalizing dissenters as something less than human. That's two out of the seven of the characteristics of a cult you mentioned. Let's look quickly at the other five..."*

Question Their Fundamental Arguments - Usually the presentation by the bureaucrat will be based on superficialities and an assumption that all there agree with their presumptions. A simple direct question can sometimes completely disorient them. "Why?" is a very good, powerful question.

*Example: A CEO is speaking about the WTO to what he presumes is a friendly audience.*

*CEO: (during speech) In the recent Star Wars Movie, The Phantom Menace, there are these two groups fighting each other. There the bad guys who are trying to limit trade, and the good guys who are trying to get through the blockade so free trade can take place. That's the WTO. We're the good guys.*

*Reporter: (after speech) During your speech you mentioned that the WTO is the good side. Given that the WTO has the potential to eliminate all existing workers safety, and environmental protection laws as "barriers to free trade" could you explain why you are the good guys?*

Demand Specifics - Remember that most bureaucrats have only the most superficial understanding of what they're talking about. For example, if they make a wild assertion you know to be wrong, you can give them one or two quick facts that disprove it, then ask them for the source of their assertion. Variations of the question, "Could you be specific about that?" are often the most devastating question you can ask.

If They Actually Answer Your Questions - This may be a question where you want to use a "softball" as opposed to a "hardball" approach. If they are giving you the answers you want, realize that you are now probing for information. Try to get as many specifics out of them as possible.

*Example:*

*The Director of Housing and Urban Development has just announced a new program linking access to low income housing to access to the housing by law enforcement*

*Reporter: Could you tell us the specific law enforcement agencies involved*

*HUD Secretary: The City Police, County Sheriffs and several Federal Agencies.*

*Reporter: Which federal agencies are these?*

*HUD Secretary: The FBI and the BATF*

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*Reporter: Could you please explain what role the FBI and BATF will be playing in these housing projects?*

*HUD Secretary: Things such as organized crime, fire arms and drugs*

*Reporter: Can you give us a specific example of one of these interventions...*

Get Copies of any Documents they Mention - If they mention a report, or study that they are using to prove their point, try to get copies of it. If not, find out from them, where you can get copies of it. Frequently you'll find that they've never read the reports or sources they mention. Sometimes these sources say something quite different from what the public figure is saying. If you've got a copy of the public figure's statement and the actual source, you can always put the two together, then do some follow-up calls to their office. If they turn you down for a follow-up response, you look more credible.

Get Contact Numbers - Get a way to contact the public figure, even if it's only through a liaison. If they mention another agency, get a contact number.

#### Be Persistent

More often than not, they will not give you a straight answer to your question. If you allow them to pause, another reporter may ask another question and they're off the hook. If you sense them starting to obfuscate in this manner, cut in quickly as soon as there's something resembling the beginning of a pause. Politely remind them of your original question, (you can even apologize that it wasn't clear) then ask them again to address your concern. If another reporter does get their question in before you, and your question is a major point, you can always try stating it again.

#### *Example:*

*A local FBI director gives a feel good speech on Community Policing describing how the communities are all supporting it.*

*Reporter: In your speech, you talked about how the minority communities are supporting community policing. A recent report from \_\_\_ shows that the thing minorities in our community most fear is law enforcement. Could you give an example of a minority community supporting community policing?*

*FBI Director: Well there's all kind of support.*

*Reporter: Could you give me a specific example?*

*FBI Director: Well, the Hispanic community*

*Reporter: Really? I remember that they recently filed a complaint about an INS raid that the police helped put together. Was there another specific incident you were referring to?*

#### Look for the Contradictions Between What They're Promoting and What They're Actually Doing

- The examples of this abound. Think of Reagan calling for an end to drug trafficking while the CIA's bring most of the cocaine into this country. Think of the Nuclear Arms industry "protecting our country" by contaminating it with more toxic waste than any terrorist could dream of. One U.S. Attorney General gave a speech on the need for all of us to help stop crime, he was then asked why he'd halted the investigation of the arms for hostages deal.

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Look for Points of Disagreement Amongst the Opposition One of the great tactical blunders perpetuated by many independent media producers is to treat those in the opposition as though they were in agreement about all points. Frequently there are major points of disagreement between the opposition and with a little bit of coaxing and luck, they can widen into rifts.

*Example: During a police group's working session, a presentation was given by a high ranking member of the police department on the need to increase the number of "gang" units in "economically depressed areas." The Reporter cited a study and raised the question that these programs might be increasing crime and endangering the community. Most importantly, continued the reporter, it was increasing the danger for the hard working officers on the street. When one of the commanding officers made a disparaging about a representative of the Police Union, the Police Union representative shot back that the suit had no idea what he was doing and that these gang programs were increasing the number of kids who became gang members.*

#### Traps

Lecturing - A lot of activists find themselves trying to lecture or bring in complicated points to a bureaucrat who isn't going to hear it.

Use of Jingoism - A lot of independent media reporting is prevented from reaching as wide an audience as it might by use of a terms that turn off people who might not be in agreement about fundamental philosophies. One of the things the opposition is skilled at is getting the disenfranchised to fight and squabble amongst themselves while the big guys carry off progressively larger pieces of the pie. One of the things independent media producers have to look at honestly is why so many of the disenfranchised come to identify with the people in power. If you're there to cover the WTO, you're not there to cover any other "ism" unless it directly relates.

Loss of Credibility - The strongest thing that indy media has over corporate media is that it can get at the truth. As long as independent media functions so that it is gathering accurate information and disseminating it, the corporate media is forced to respond. Using inaccurate information, name calling, loss of temper are all things that chip away at that credibility. It gives the corporate media a way to dismiss you.