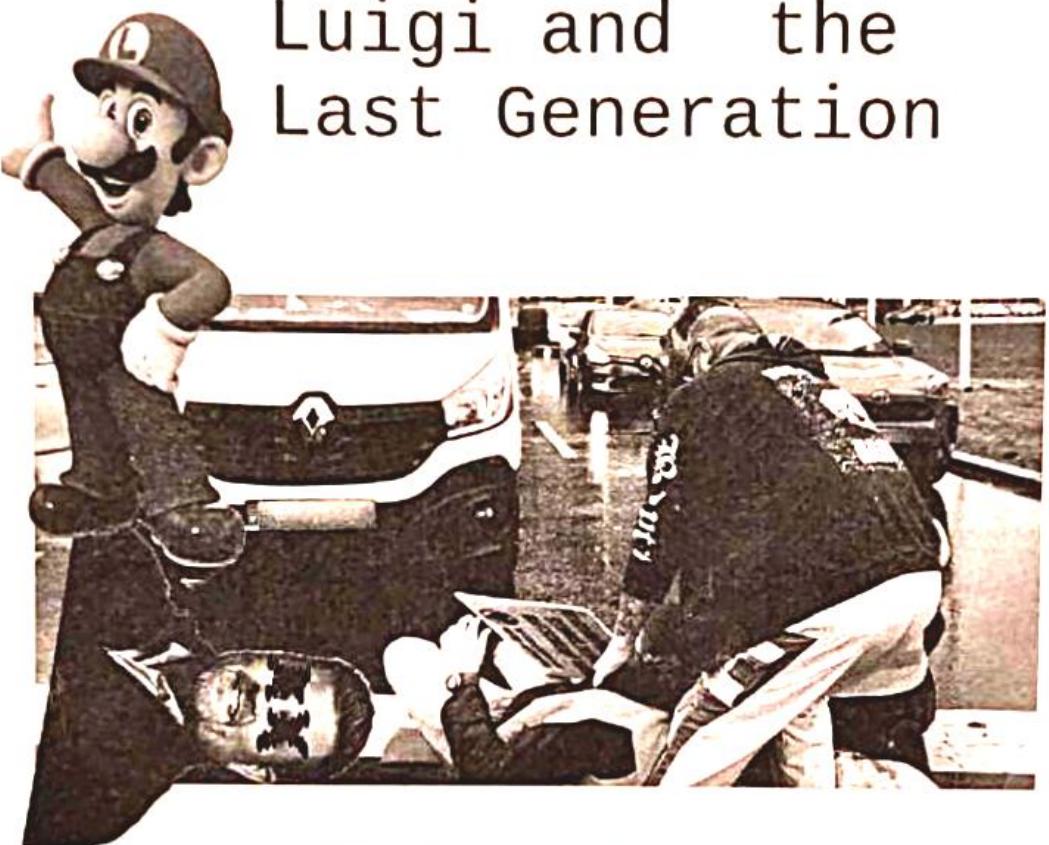


Luigi and the Last Generation



on radical tactics
and what we got wrong about
the mainstream

0. if you have a short attention span or not enough time

- climate activists blocking roads or throwing soup at paintings are often seen as
 - selfish
 - ignorant
 - extremist
 - in the wrong
- the murderer of the CEO of United Healthcare is seen by many as
 - selfless
 - compassionate
 - a normal person
 - in the right
- this shows public support is not necessarily about the tactics of action
- using examples we argue that it is about
 - how much people can relate to the problem the action is against
 - and how much the action affects them personally
- people support actions most if they relate to the problem but are not affected by the action
- and least if they cannot relate to the problem and are directly affected by the action
- at the same time much of the left focuses on NVDA
- because there is widespread support for violent action in the mainstream, recruiting radical activists from the mainstream might be a better bet than from the existing left

1. introduction

On December 4th 2024, Brian Thompson, the CEO of United Healthcare (UHC) was shot in the back three times outside of a hotel in Manhattan. The bullet casings read “deny”, “defend” and “depose”,

referring to the strategy used by US healthcare companies to get out of paying for people's healthcare claims. Brian Thompson had been CEO of UHC since 2021. Under his management, profits increased from \$12 to \$16 million, UHC rolled out a plan to deny payment for "non-critical" emergency room visits, and they started using AI to automate the denial of claims. Currently, United Health Group, owning UHC is the 8th largest company in the world by revenue and has been criticised massively for making profits off people's health. It is not difficult to understand why one would dislike a company that makes money off of our misery.

At the same time, climate activists around the world, often from groups like Extinction Rebellion (XR), Just Stop Oil (JSO) or Last Generation (LG) throw soup at paintings, paint at monuments, or glue themselves onto the street. They are protesting the widespread destruction of the planet, through the emission of greenhouse gases, plundering of natural resources and industrialisation with disregard for any other living beings than rich, mostly white humans. These climate activists do not shoot CEOs. They also do not beat them up. Most of the time, they will also not trash their cars, because these activists believe in Non-Violent Direct Action. What non-violence is and is not is a can of worms not worth opening here. What is important here: these climate activists consider their actions as non-violent. The suspect of Brian Thompson's assassination has not made a claim on this, but there is good reason to assume they will not call themselves "non-violent".

What is important is the following: One of the two receives widespread public support from all across the political spectrum, while the other side is beaten in public, receives death threats and is laughed at and shamed online. If you have not looked at the news at all, you probably know who is who.

The point here is not to argue who has the better public image. The point is to talk about something surprising: while both actions are

desparate answers to problems, the much more radical one receives a lot of public support and the less radical one receives a lot of backlash. At the same time, all we hear in organising spaces is “Don’t be too radical, you will never convince the masses!”. So why is it that the “the conventional wisdom is 180 degrees the opposite of what actually is the case”?□¹ This zine looks at both cases, why the outcomes are so different and what we can learn from it. It proposes a simple 2x2 matrix for looking at your own protest activity and wants to offer a new perspective on the left as a movement.

2. last generation

What do they do?

For this purpose, the term Last Generation (LG) summarises a number of groups that have several things in common: - they are focused on the problem of climate change - they are strongly influenced by the thought of Roger Hallam - they focus on non-violent direct action (NVDA) - their framing of NVDA usually does not include targeted industrial sabotage - they aim to mobilise masses

They also share a rather specific strategy of blockading strategic locations such as large streets in cities to raise awareness for the climate crisis. They are distinct from groups such as Ende Gelände, Code Rouge or Rising Tide which focus on blockading polluters directly. LG like groups have frequently stated they aim to take the fight for climate justice directly to the mass public.

Recently however, multiple groups have moved away from tactics such as glueing themselves onto streets or have stopped all together. LG in Germany has stopped blockading streets, locking or glueing onto streets and other obstacles and now focuses much more on trying to confront politicians verbally and visiting locations of environmental destruction.□²

how are they framed in the mainstream?

This zine is not the place to argue about the efficiency of the tactics in LG like movements. Much can and has been said about the problems of appealing to the establishment to try and solve problems they have no interest in solving. This zine is not the place to bash LG and the like, it just wants to point out that these movements do not really have the best reputation with the mainstream.

Examples of the way LG like movements are framed in mass media include: “It is not yet clear what the climate-gluers (referring to how people glue themselves onto things) will have to apologise for in 35 years: their illegal actions, their flights to Asia, or not having been radical enough” (FAZ, German Newspaper □³) According to FAZ, whatever they are doing right now is wrong, one way or another.

LG has also been called “egoistic”, “extremist” and “having a disregard for human lives” for blocking roads□⁴, while compilations of JSO activists being beaten up get more than half a million views on Youtube, with comments calling them “ignorant”, “selfish”, “mentally unwell” and “not in touch with reality”□⁵.

Surely, there have also been positive voices about these movements, but a lot of the media and public comments have framed LG like groups as - selfish - ignorant - extremist - in the wrong

This is not so good if you are trying to win over the masses.

3. versus Luigi

What did he do?

Luigi Magnione is the suspected shooter of Brian Thompson. Regardless of whether he did it or not, someone shot Brian Thompson dead, in the middle of Manhattan, on a regular morning. The murder was clearly politically motivated: the casings read “deny”, “defend”, “depose”.

How was he framed?

Again, this zine is not the place to discuss the morality of shooting CEOs, let alone the efficiency in achieving political goals. Much can and has been said about the fact that CEOs are replaceable, or that his kids will suffer immense trauma and should not suffer from the personal choices of their father. This zine is not the place to bash or glorify what Luigi did or did not do, it just wants to point out that he has got a better rep in a lot of places than LG and the like.

Many large media outlets across the political spectrum, such as CNN, FOX News, Forbes or the BBC reported that Luigi was seen as a hero. □⁶* People made memes with Luigi from Smash Bros, #FreeLuigi trended all over the internet, people protested in front of the court for him, and the government got a bit scared. The homeland security secretary general of the U.S. went on TV openly acknowledging that people were considering Luigi a hero and said it was very concerning. He said “We’ve seen narratives of anti-government sentiment. We’ve seen personal grievances in the language of violence.”□⁶. Large public outings of anti-government sentiments, this should warm every anarchists’ heart.

Surely, there has also been backlash against the murder. This is to be expected. Some people do have compassion for someone being killed, even if it is a CEO, but a lot of the public has framed Luigi as

- selfless
- compassionate
- a normal person
- in the right

This sounds much more like someone who can win over the masses. And the trending Amazon sales of Tshirts saying “Mommy’s little CEO killer” or “Deny, Defend, Depose” and a \$200k immediate fundraiser for legal costs are plain facts.

4. why this difference?

So why is there such a big difference between the perception of LG like protests and the killing of a CEO? The other way around it would not be that surprising: surely a minor inconvenience like blocking a road, meaning some people will not make it to work on time, is less outrageous than the cold-blooded murder of a family father, shooting him in the back in a politically motivated assassination. However, this is not the case. Why are people on Luigi's side and *not* on LG's?

We think it has to do with if you are personally affected, by the problem, and by the protest. We can see:

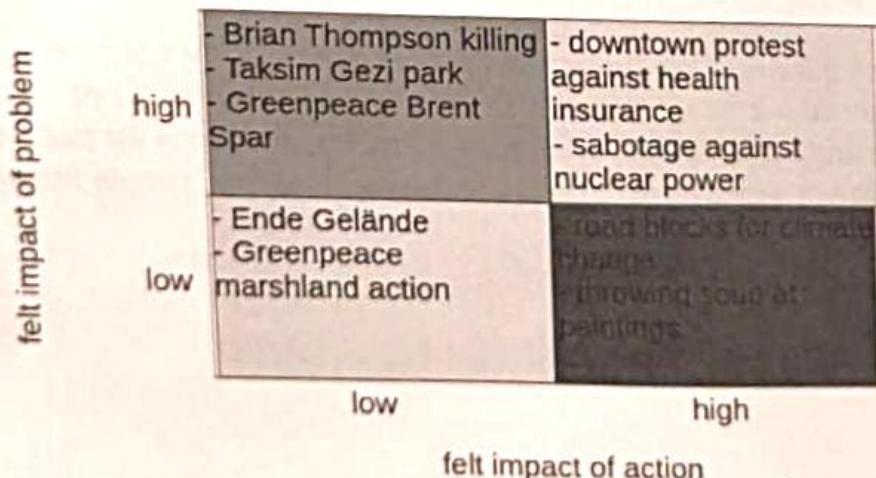
- 1. Many people do *not* (yet) feel the personal impact of the climate crisis.** In industrialised nation states, like those in continental Europe, or the UK, many people do not yet feel the personal impact of the climate crisis. If you live in the UK and it is rainy and moderately warm in the summer, and rainy and moderately cold in the winter, you have good reason to feel like climate change is nothing that impacts you. Only few people have felt the catastrophic impacts of climate change personally through floods or forest fires, and even then manage to attribute these catastrophes to extremely unlikely weather events. Not feeling the impact personally makes it harder to relate to people who feel the impact and take desperate action
- 2. Many people feel the personal impact of the health system crisis in the US.** In the US, pharma companies have been to court for trying to market opioids specifically for children[□], the country is in a massive prescription drug addiction crisis, and health insurances are making great efforts to not pay out their customers. Having money definitely helps your health, but in the end of the day being rich and white is not a safeguard against illness and the potential need of a functioning healthcare system. Feeling the impact of the problem personally

makes it easier to relate to people who feel the impact and take desperate action

So far, this was exclusively about the problem and not about the form of protesting or taking action, but we believe this is also important:

3. **Many people feel the personal impact of LG like protests.** LG like protests target transport bottlenecks and public places. Roadblocks and throwing soup at paintings affects people directly: they cannot get their children to school anymore, cannot get to work on time, or enjoy their visit to the museum in peace. LG, JSO and the like bring 'their problems' to 'your doorstep', and it sucks.
4. **Many people do not feel the personal impact of a CEO being killed.** Many people die every day. Most of the people do not care if they do not feel like they have a personal relation to them. Hunger in Yemen? Too bad. A CEO killed? Guess he had a risky job, hey? At least he was paid well.

From this it is possible to distill a simple 2x2 matrix of political action, along the lines of whether the public feels the impact of the problem and the impact of the action personally.



In the first quadrant there are actions that targeted at problems a lot of people can relate to, but that have limited impact on them. They exist in all forms and with vastly different tactics: There is the killing of Brian Thompson, related to the health insurance crisis, but someone only a negligible percentage of U.S. Americans had a personal relationship with. There is the Taksim Gezi park movement against the authoritarian government in Turkey. Many people living in Turkey found this relatable and the events in Istanbul did not impact a lot of people personally because they were extremely localised. But also non-violent direct action, like Greenpeace's blocking of the Brent Spar to prevent its decommissioning in the North Sea can fall into this category. Many people were scared of the personal impact of oil and chemicals in the North sea, but the blockading did not prevent them from going to work either. Win-Win.

In the second quadrant, there are actions that are targeted at problems a lot of people can relate to, but also impact them. This includes for example down-town protests against things people do really care about, or the sabotage against nuclear power by groups in Europe in the 80s that left households without power temporarily. These are the types of actions people grudgingly accept, because they stand behind the cause and are willing to endure inconveniences in return for feeling like their interests are heard and a fight is being fought.

In the third quadrant are the actions people generally do not care about. They do not relate to the problem and the action does not happen in any capacity that influences them. Rural actions for nature conservation or against fossil fuels are examples of this. People might

be a bit annoyed at the “waste of tax money” for policing these actions, but generally just do not care about them, if the action even makes it into their newsfeed.

The fourth quadrant is the danger zone. This is where you really piss people off. It is a problem people are not personally affected by, but they are affected by the protest. There is no more grudgingly accepting and recognition of a fight. Protesters are declared selfish, ignorant, and insane. Examples of this include road blocks that prevent people from getting their kids to school or themselves to work, when the issue at hand is irrelevant to people involved. It can also be the case that people do not have a similar understanding to the protesters: they might acknowledge climate change in general as a problem, but think the government will solve it quickly enough

So seemingly, the support of the protest depends on whether it affects you negatively and whether the problem is one that affects you or you can at least relate to. You can also try to come up with more examples of the different quadrants, but one thing is clear:

Support of an act of protest does not depend on tactics that much

You can get away (in the eyes of the public) with killing someone if it is for the right cause. The general public is not against violence either. Videos of bullies being beaten up are trending on Youtube, average people throw rocks at the police during Palestine protests and 60% of U.S. Americans are in favor of the death penalty.^{□¹⁰}

Problems create stress, fear and desperation, mentally and physically. Fighting (violently) is a natural response to this. Violent opposition to problems threaten our livelihood can be relatable to the public. The killing of Brian Thompson is an extreme case of this, but not an anomaly.

5. implications for the radical left

There are a lot of things we think the (radical) left can learn from this, some of them are not new learnings, but often not taken very seriously.

People support actions and protests most if they are affected by, or understand the problem, *but* the action itself does not. Relatable problems do have the power to make people (grudgingly) accept actions that cause inconveniences for them. So problems that we fight against should be tangible to many, and if we have a choice we should choose a form of action that causes inconveniences for as few of the people affected by the problem as possible.

So far, so few new arguments. Most of this is common sense and many consider this, but here is the twist: Big parts of the current left are strongly influenced by the philosophy of non-violent direct action. We think that this has a tradition in the peace movements around the world which wanted to take a deliberate step back from violence to make a stronger case of fighting against war, weapons and violence. More recently, there has been a large focus on NVDA because of movements influenced by Roger Hallam. XR, LG, JSO and other movements currently under the umbrella of the A22 network are shaped by the ideas and thought of Roger Hallam, who based on a selective reading of scientific studies, believes in the superiority of NVDA for political action, both morally and practically.

We want to break with this thought. Many groups and movements have advocated for a diversity of tactics because they think it is necessary to achieve political goals if we face such strong resistance. We agree with this. At the same time, very few people actively disagree with the statement that non-violence is the best strategy to capture the masses and build a mass movement. We do. Based on events like the killing of Brian Thompson, we believe that the societal mainstream is *not* categorically against violence, even in very

extreme forms. It is not about the tactics, it is about the situation they are used in. NVDA is *not* the only way of building a mass movement and getting the masses behind you.

Looking at the what we are up against very pragmatically, it is reasonable to be scared. It is reasonable to be desperate. It is reasonable to feel the urge to fight for our lives, because this is reality. Reality is also that much of the left is stuck in their NVDA mindset. Who are our allies in a desperate fight for our lives when the mainstream is more supportive of these violent fights than the people we thought we were fighting with all this time?

There are many people like Luigi out there. They are not all anarchist, they are not all vegan, and they are not all politically correct. But they are desperate, they are willing to fight and they are backed by many.

So if you are responsible for our problems, you should be fucking scared.

footnotes

1. Mark Rippetoe reference. Sorry I like getting strong.
2. <https://letztegeneration.org/en/pm/strategie-fuer-2024/>
3. <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/gegen-die-klimakleber-muss-geltendes-recht-auch-angewendet-werden-19150384.html>
4. <https://www.derwesten.de/politik/letzte-generation-klebeprotest-klimaaktivisten-b-id300112398.html>
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7us6JRGwk>
6. <https://www.fox5ny.com/news/hero-murderer-luigi-mangione-case-sparks-polarizing-reactions-online>
7. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/petersuci/2024/12/12/luigi-mangione-has-become-a-social-media-folk-hero/>
8. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gp9ejk40no>
9. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36323465/>
10. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/06/02/most-americans-favor-the-death-penalty-despite-concerns-about-its-administration/>

feedback

After the initial drafting period, we sent the zine to some people asking for their comments on it. We consider their feedback and additional thoughts very valuable and decided to include them as standalone, complete statements.

person 1

I think it's well written and makes sense, I understand (I think) what you are saying. I think that the reasons you have outlined are true about why Luigi is popular and last generation in terms of how much it impacts people and in terms if what that means for general public support.

However i guess I also think that mainstream people like those sorts of actions because it fits within the liberal world view , "if good people (hero) just kill bad people (villian) it will all be better" and I think that it is this world view that needs to be challenged more than anything and that road blocking actions - while unpopular- do push a collective responsibility narrative, which I think I just realistic and necessary. Luigi is popular because Its like a hollywood movie and people don't have to be confronted about their own participation in the problem like people are when they are blocked in traffic by a climate protest that is saying "you are also responsible for carrying on like nothing is fucked up here" . I agree that people like Luigi style actions but think that its because because they are largely grandstanders, who want things to happen but generally wont do anything to make them happen. This sort of thing allows them to feel like there is a change

politically happening (because someone did a lone wolf action, people think maybe will trigger more to happen which then leads in to an anti organisational position where we think we dont have to try to orgsnise people) It means change feels like its happening without there actually being anything changed or built structurally that is an alternative to neo liberal capitalism.

I don't think this sort of insurrectionary action gets us much closer to building an anarchist world to replace this capitalist one, i think its great for narrative building but I think it's narrative building in a kinda individualised way, where as higher participation, lower risk or just generally higher participatory actions are things are spaces that alternative societies can be built around, even when they are unpopular.

I guess also I don't think that public support is an indicator of effectiveness above things, I think what is necessary (a new system) is not going to make sense for quite a while to anyone who hasn't accepted ecological collapse as a reality.

Anyway I do like what you wrote and think that Luigi acting was very powerful in many ways

person 2

I find your ideas interesting, and especially the point when and why actions receive mass support is pretty clear and well formulated. I think this makes it understandable also for people who are not in a leftist bubble.

Additionally I think that the writing on the shell casings (which almost seemed humoristic) is an interesting point. It fits with the narrative of a 'good story' and distracts from the reality of the murder

I agree with the feedback [of the other person] on the point that Luigi's action fits very much into the 'good people kill bad people' narrative, which in the U.S. is pushed extremely. I find that

problematic. I also think that blockading as a form of action can be good and useful to create a collective sense of responsibility. At the same time I think that people in the leftist bubble sometimes put too much energy into organising together and because of that think that the only way to reach our goals is mass-mobilising and reaching/capturing the masses. Or that capturing the masses should be the goal. I think using such tactics the individualistic aspect of movements and change disappears. The chance may be small, but sometimes a single person in the right place at the right time is enough to make a real impact. History also shows us that a majority is definitely not needed for change (even it might be a bit more difficult in our current situation). I do not find it sensible to wait for individuals to start tackling problems and change, but only focusing on organising and structural work is also botchy. In my eyes there is need for a lot of structural work (because of sustainability), but there is also a need for clear and dominant impulses to really get something going - good chaos?! I see a lot of potential in inaccessible and weird looking actions, because it is difficult to predict and control for the state.

Luigi also shows the 'simplicity' of a very extreme action. He just came flying on his bike and shot the CEO dead. Even though the moral implications are a completely different question, I think that it can be pretty empowering to see that it can also be 'this easy'.

Additionally I am also asking myself, if the thing that a lot of people support is in fact also the right thing. But this is a very big can of worms.