

Costs and Risks in Nonviolent Conflict

Fletcher Summer Institute for the
Advanced Study of Nonviolent Conflict

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Nonviolent Conflict is a Contest

Movements can:

1. Take action to improve their positions
2. Take action to weaken their opponents

Opponents can:

1. Take action to improve their positions
2. Take action to weaken the movement

Nonviolent Conflict is a Contest

2. Take action to weaken their opponents

Costs and Risks

Cost: Specific expense or penalty. Some costs can be projected and regulated.
(e.g. lost income from a boycott).

Risk: Potential loss that may occur because of an action, but is *not certain* in effect, scale or timing .
(e.g. arrest, other repression)

Outline


Three kinds of costs that movements and their opponents impose:

1. Economic/Material costs
2. Legitimacy/Political costs
3. Social/Psychological costs

Part 1: Economic and Material Costs

Economic and Material Costs

Montgomery bus

boycott 

 Downtown Nashville
boycott

Economic and Material Costs

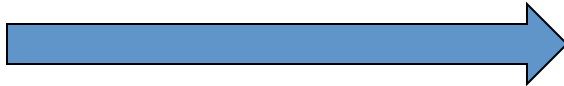
Port Elizabeth

boycott



Economic and Material Costs

Strike and boycott
by the United
Farm Workers



Economic and Material Costs

Indian boycott of British cloth

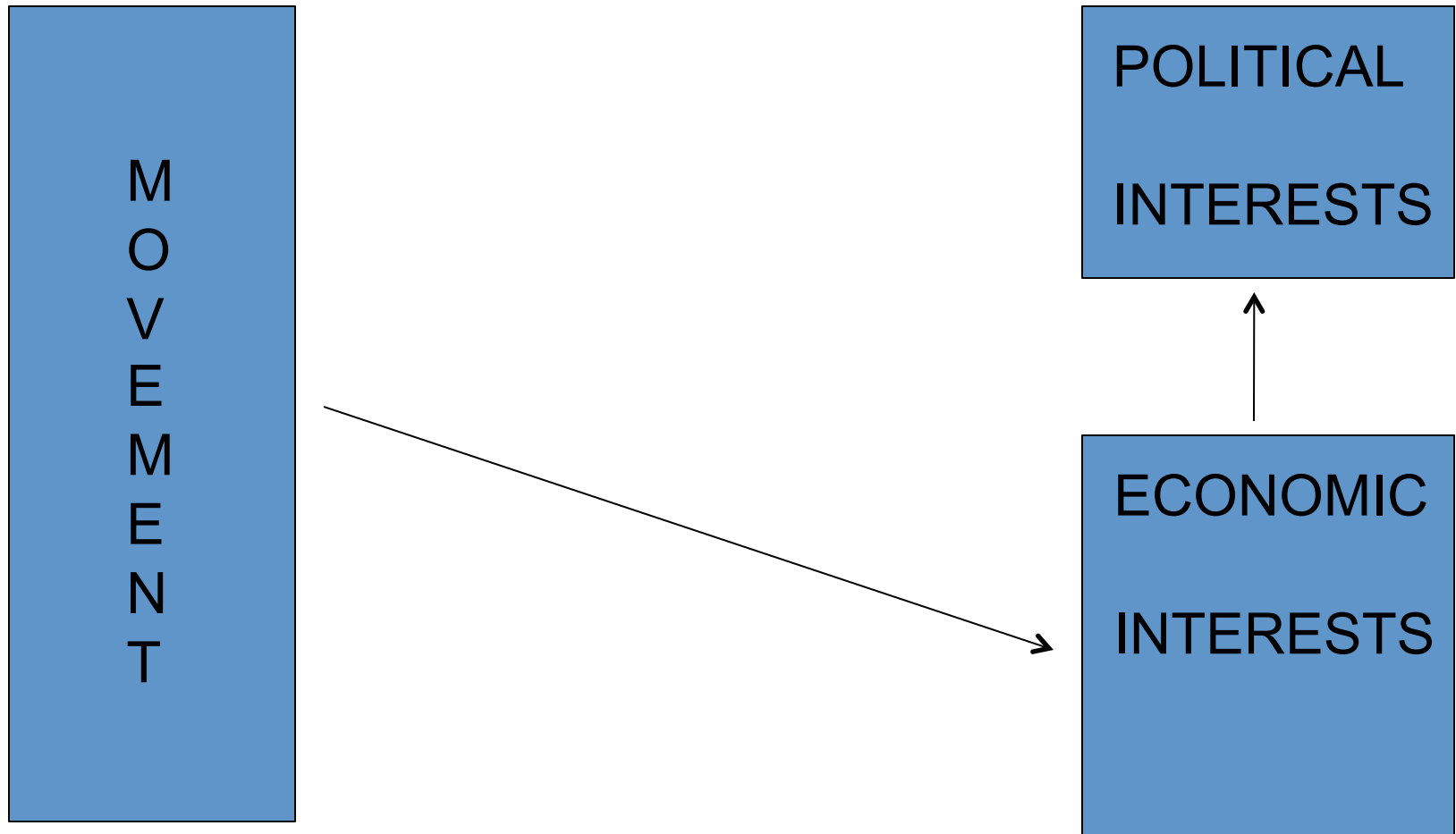
Economic and Material Costs

East Timor Action Network (ETAN)
campaign against US military assistance
to Indonesia

Other examples: “No March”, stickers and
graffiti, Budrus wall protest, tactics of
dispersion

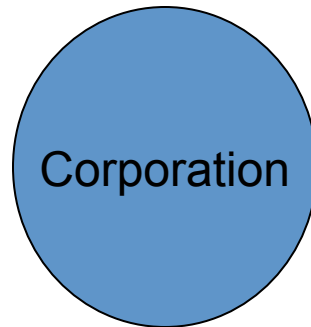
Why Are Tactics That Impose Economic Costs Powerful?

Key Concept: Creating Divisions

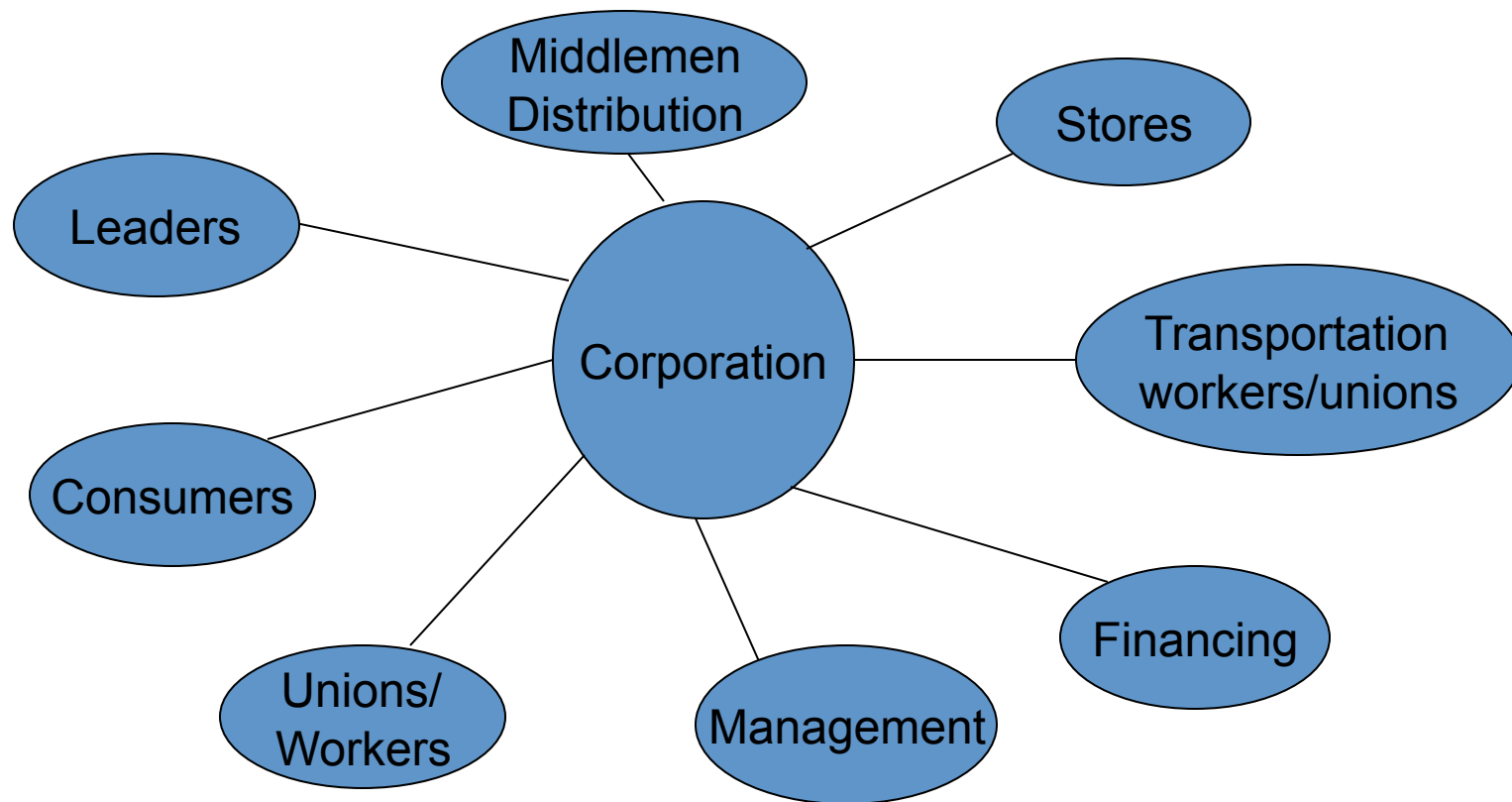


Economic/Material Costs: Target Selection

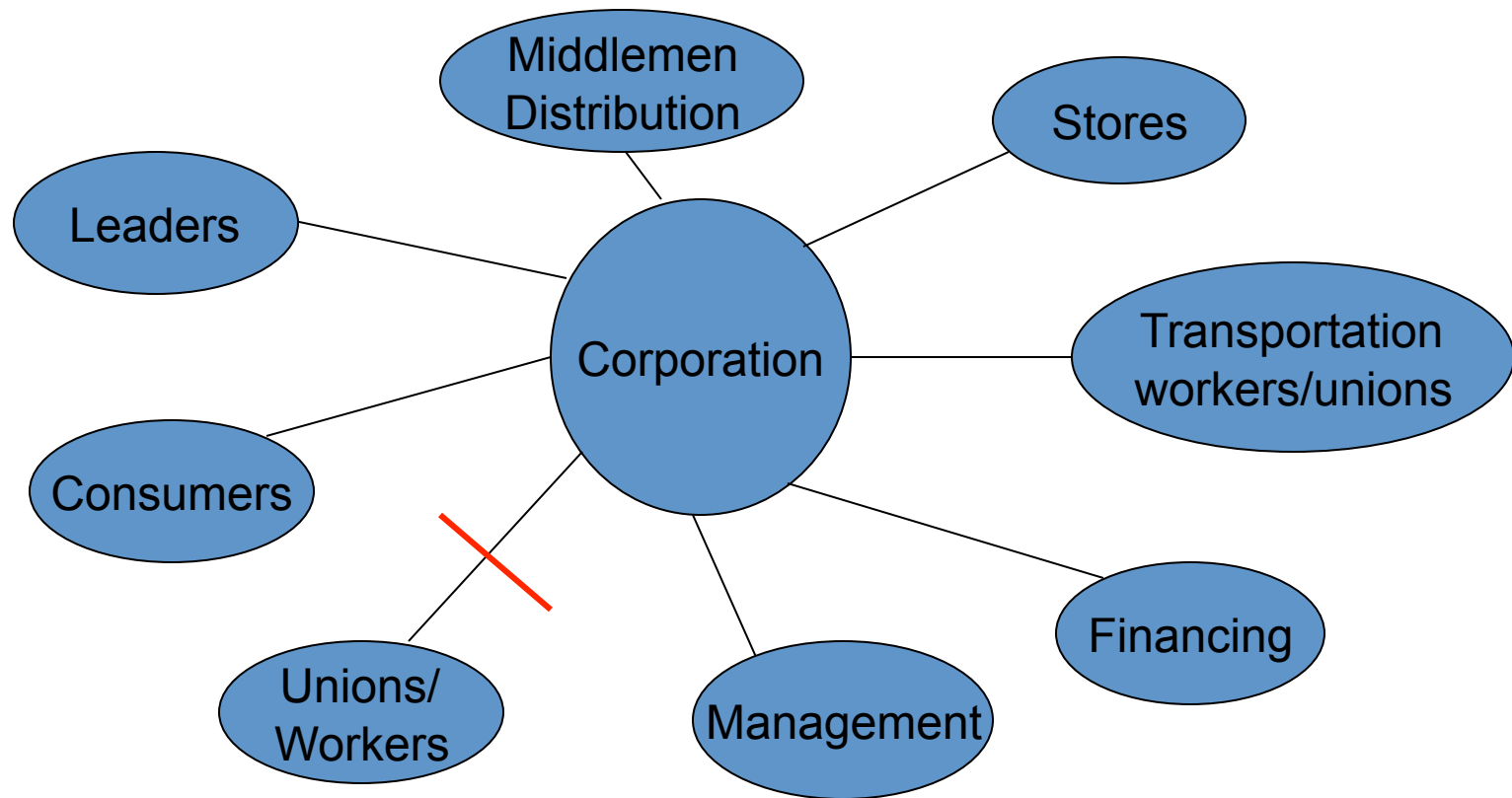
Key Concept: Target Selection Through Tactical Mapping



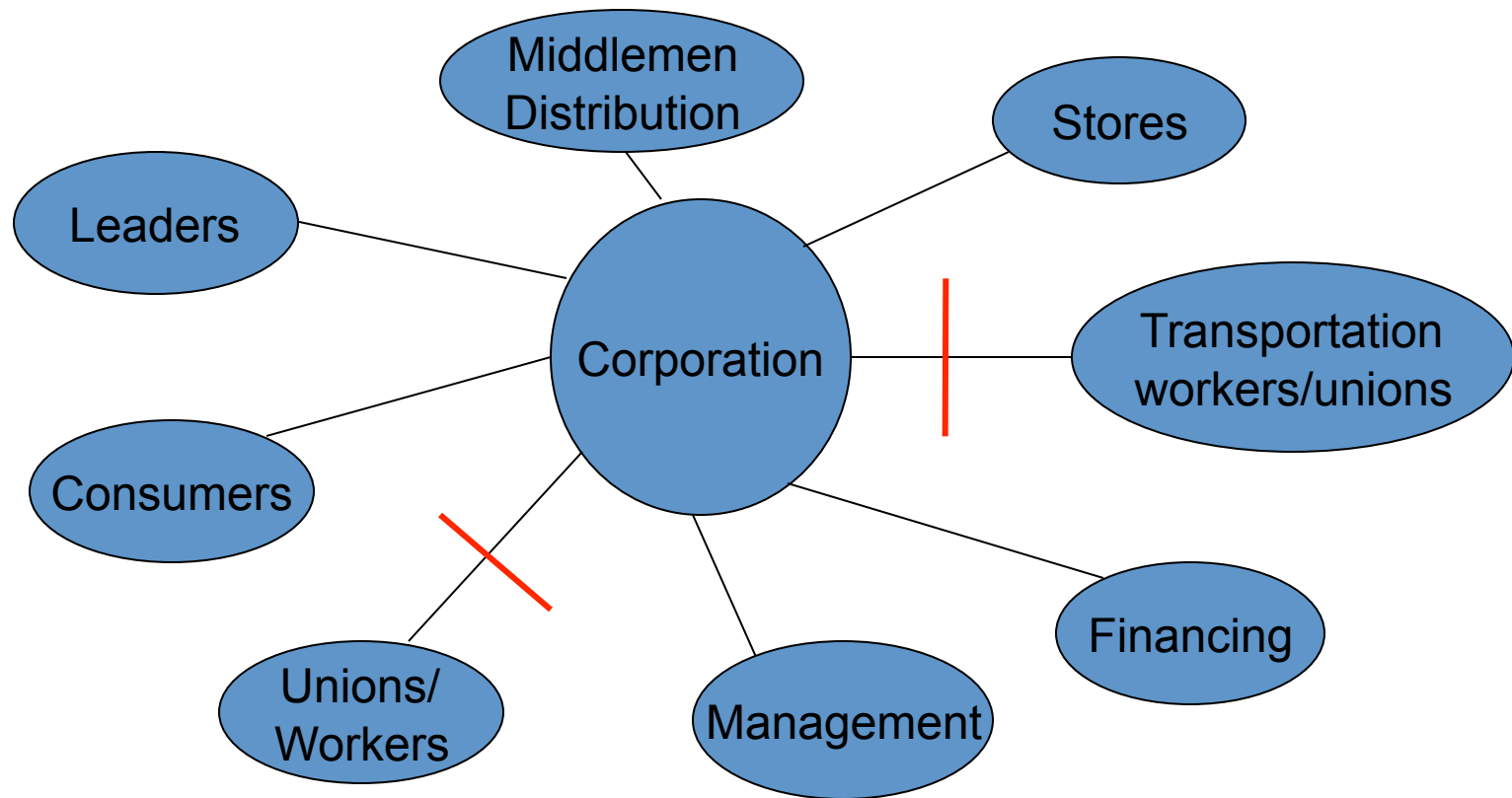
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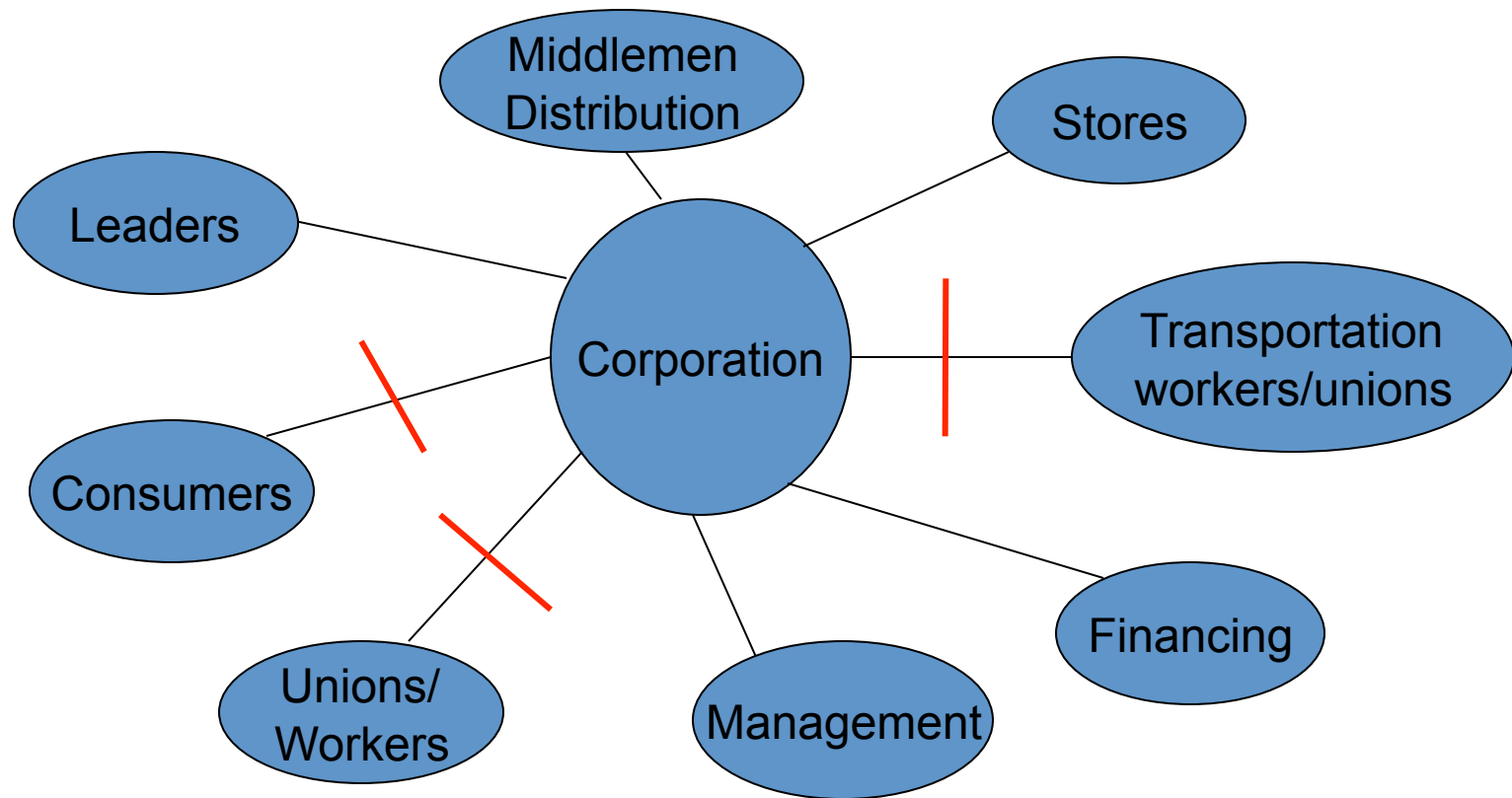
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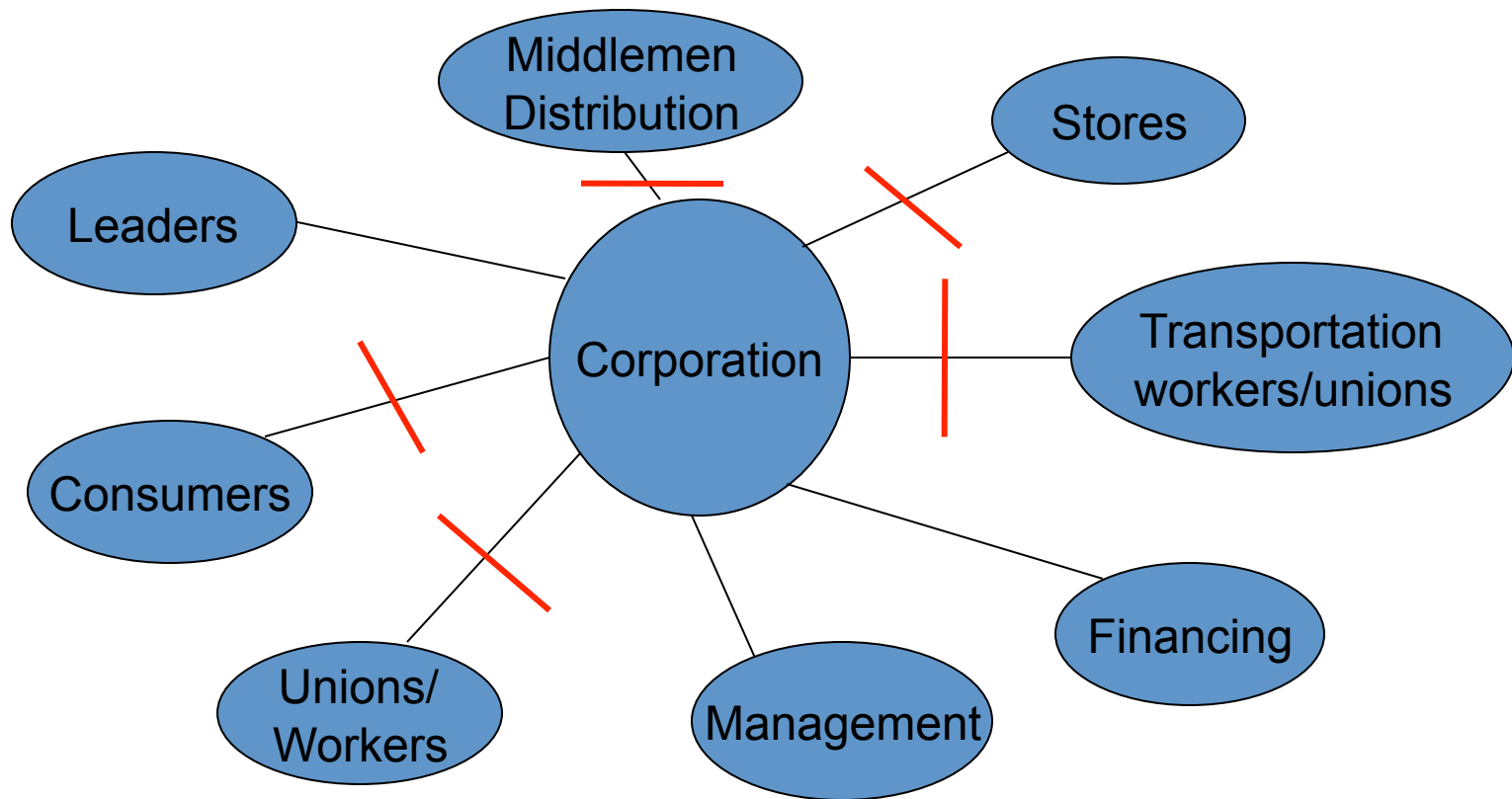
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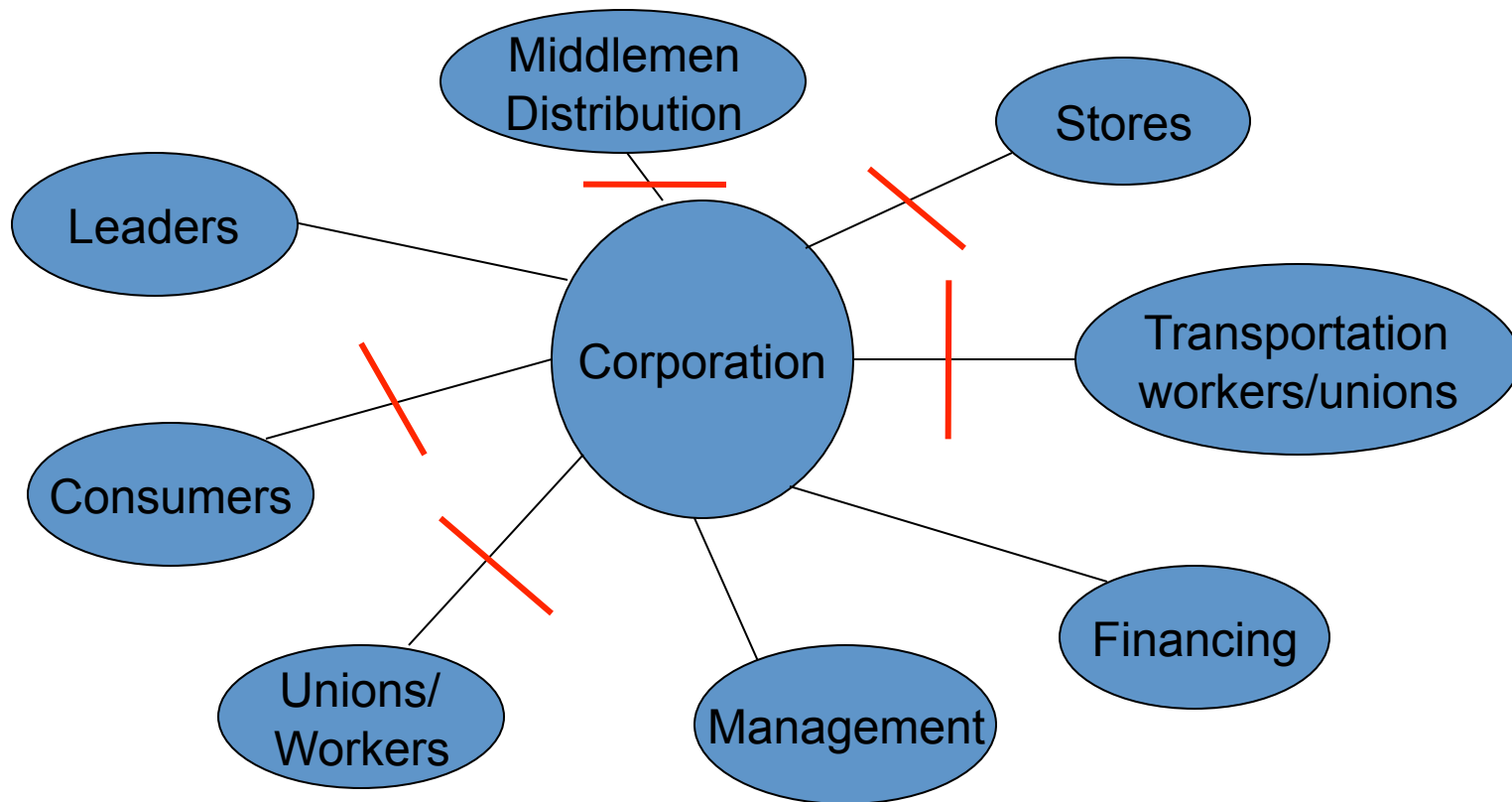
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Key Concept: Target Selection Through Tactical Mapping



Lessons Learned?



Risks of Imposing Economic and Material Costs

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Risks of Imposing Economic and Material Costs

A movement must be able to survive its own offense!

- Strike funds
- Need for parallel institutions
- Economic and material costs can be passed on

Part 2: Political and Legitimacy Costs



Political and Legitimacy Costs

Otpor's response
to repression:

“This is the face
of Serbia.”

Political and Legitimacy Costs

Salt March

Political and Legitimacy Costs

Solidarity's push for independent labor unions

Political and Legitimacy Costs

Kmara protest in front of the Georgian
Health Ministry

Political and Legitimacy Costs

Chile – Slow down actions

Norway – paper clips and potatoes

Burma – farmer's hat campaign

Iranian women at the 2006 World Cup

Dilemma Actions

1. Find legal restrictions that are widely unpopular, particularly those that affect people's day-to-day or personal lives
2. Design tactics to challenge these restrictions. Tactics may employ humor, public individuals, religious/cultural/patriotic language or symbols

Dilemma Actions

3. Strategize to gain as much as possible after the tactic has taken place, regardless of outcome

Making Repression Backfire*

Backfire:

1. Reveal – expose the injustice
2. Redeem – validate the target
3. Reframe – emphasize the injustice
4. Redirect – mobilize support
5. Resist – stand up to intimidation

* This framework was developed by Brian Martin.

Available at: <http://www.bmartin.cc/pubs/bf/bfbasics.pdf>

Risks of Imposing Political and Legitimacy Costs?

Risks

Unclear message:

Risks

Tactics can get hijacked by outside groups:

Incidents of violence: