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A Strategic Program to Create a Good Society

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The strategy for fundamental change described in the last chapter provides a general outline, but how can we implement it?

This chapter details a strategic program for progressive transformation — a strategy that possesses the crucial characteristics and incorporates the six essential components described in the last chapter. Relying heavily on a broad educational process, this strategic program would persuade an ever-larger number of people to support fundamental progressive change. Then, working primarily in small, local organizations, progressive activists would use their collective strength to nonviolently challenge and undermine destructive institutions while developing new, progressive institutions.

This chapter provides an overview of the strategic program. The next five chapters offer a specific project to implement this strategy.

A STRATEGIC PROGRAM

Building on models developed by historians, sociologists, and social change theoreticians over the last century, this strategic program involves several major parts.¹ For the sake of clarity, I have divided this program into four main stages with several sub-stages. Though described here as if they are distinct and sequential, these stages would blend and intertwine.

*The wind and the waves
are always on the side
of the ablest navigators.*
— Edward Gibbon

Note that progressive activists are already working in all the stages described here, though at a level that appears to be insufficient to bring about fundamental change. The program I envision would augment this current work. Also, note that unlike most earlier strategies, which typically assume historic change occurring over a few years, this strategy would extend over many decades.*

1. Lay the Groundwork

In the first stage, the public is largely ignorant of ways to bring about comprehensive change. Virtually everyone feels either content with the current society or hopeless about the prospects for significant change (as most people do now).

* As a conceptual aid, I think of these stages as each lasting roughly twenty years and being sequential. However, as noted in the section below entitled “Overlapping Stages,” these stages overlap and intertwine and may take many more or many fewer years to implement.

Four Stages of Societal Transformation

1. Lay the Groundwork

- A. Find Other Progressives
- B. Learn How Human Affairs are Now Organized
- C. Learn and Practice Change Skills
- D. Form Supportive Communities

2. Gather Support

- A. Raise Consciousness
- B. Build Organizational Strength

3. Struggle for Power

- A. Challenge the Power Structure through
Conventional Political and Legal Methods
- B. Illuminate Domination and Oppression
- C. Fight Oppression Using Nonviolent Action
- D. Develop Popular Alternative Institutions

4. Diffuse Change Throughout Society

During this time, people desiring positive change would locate each other. They would also learn what they need to know to bring about powerful change, and they would build strong communities for mutual support.

A. FIND OTHER PROGRESSIVES

Those people of goodwill who desire positive change would first seek out other like-minded people. When they found each other, they would discuss and develop their ideas for change. They would encourage each other to ask difficult questions and would search together for real answers, even if that meant looking beyond conventional progressive wisdom.

B. LEARN HOW HUMAN AFFAIRS ARE NOW ORGANIZED

These progressive-minded people would then learn all about our current society. They would learn how elite interests control the social, economic, political, and cultural institutions of society and how the power structure entices and forces us all to support the status quo. They would explore issues such as why sales taxes are charged on almost every commodity, but not on the

The penalty good men pay for indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by evil men. — Plato

sale of stocks and bonds. They would study progressive change campaigns of the past and examine change methods that might be effective now. They would investigate alternative institutions of the past and decide which might be useful now.

In addition, these progressive people would observe the ways that socialization, oppression, and emotional trauma affect human beings and find ways to overcome destructive conditioning. They would explore their own dysfunctional socialization and emotional conditioning, notice the ways they currently behave ineffectively, and learn better ways.

C. LEARN AND PRACTICE CHANGE SKILLS

These progressives would then begin to think of themselves as “activists.” They would learn the skills necessary to launch campaigns for change and practice their skills by joining current efforts to challenge the power structure and harmful social norms. They would research issues, circulate petitions, boycott destructive companies, and help progressive politicians run for elective office. They would support existing alternative institutions (like cooperatives) and explore ways to build new ones.

D. FORM SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

These activists would also establish supportive change communities with other progressive activists. As much as possible, they would treat each other well and live as if they already had a good society: they would “live the vision now” in their everyday lives. They would also find ways to support each other physically, financially, and emotionally. They would begin to work through their own negative socialization and emotional conditioning, and they would work to develop the determination and self-discipline necessary to bring about significant positive change.

At the successful end of Stage 1, hundreds of thousands of progressive activists would have developed a great deal of experience and change skill — more than most activists have today. They would have a deep understanding of how large, impersonal forces shape our society. They would also have changed their work and home lives to minimize the worst pressures of conventional society on themselves. When possible, they would live in a mutually supportive community with other activists.

2. Gather Support

In the second stage, activists would reach out to millions of regular people — raising awareness and building powerful organizations.

A. RAISE CONSCIOUSNESS

To raise awareness about the need for change, activists would speak to members of existing organizations (church and civic organizations groups, labor unions, professional associations, and so forth), distribute leaflets at community events (festivals, county fairs, concerts) or door-to-door, and publish newspapers, magazines, books, and web pages on the internet. They would produce radio and TV shows and speak out on street corners. They would petition, vigil,

march, parade, and picket. They would perform political theater and sing inspiring songs of change.

Through these means, activists would identify a variety of societal problems and explain (or directly demonstrate)

Ideas are the factors that lift civilization. They create revolutions. There is more dynamite in an idea than in many bombs.

— John H. Vincent

that existing institutions cannot or will not solve these problems. They would contrast these flawed institutions with progressive alternatives that *do* address and solve these problems.* They would paint a vision of a good, non-oppressive society and describe a viable strategy for getting there.

They would cite the immediate and long-term material, emotional, and spiritual benefits of a good society for all of humankind and the immediate benefits of working for change to activists (such as enhanced self-respect and warm fellowship). In addition, they would urge people to learn more and to join in the effort to create a good society.

To raise consciousness, progressive activists would first encourage people to talk with their friends about their troubles and fears. This interaction would likely reveal that each person's problems are not unique, but are actually shared by many others. Activists would also point out that many of these problems are the result of large social and political forces that can only be addressed through society-wide change. They would further explain that society is structured in such a way that it often supports oppression and perpetuates personal dysfunction. For example, activists might point out that schools often teach students to think they are stupid instead of helping them to learn.

Activists would explain how people are socialized to accept cultural norms and show that many of these norms do

You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him find it within himself. — Galileo

not serve us well. They would describe new cultural mores that were more humane and suitable. They would model these values with their own behavior, and they would help others unearth their own positive social skills. They would also demonstrate various ways to develop positive social norms and spread them to other people.

In addition, activists would explain how humans internalize their emotional injuries and demonstrate potent ways to heal these hurts. They would make it clear that many “immutable personality traits” are actually just the lingering manifestations of emotional trauma. They would help people to develop complete respect for themselves and encourage them to accept others.

* To show people that existing institutions are unresponsive, activists might use some of the techniques described below in Stages 3A and 3B. Demonstrating alternatives is classified as Stage 3D.

Progressive activists would encourage people to look at their own lives, ask questions, and discuss their ideas with others. They would encourage people to develop a broad environmental, humanistic, and global consciousness and strive for the elimination of all oppression of all people (and other species and the natural environment) in all ways at all levels. They would explain the limitations of simple reforms and point out the need for deep systemic transformation to end all oppression. Above all, they would encourage people to take action.

Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make thee mad.
— Aldous Huxley

During this stage, there are several specific societal myths, propagated by the power elite and conservatives, that activists would need to challenge and debunk:

- **Myth:** Your troubles are your own fault.
- **Myth:** Your troubles are caused by racial minorities, immigrants, women, poor people, drug addicts, fuzzyheaded liberals, or haughty professors.
- **Myth:** It is impossible to have a good society — so this is the best for which we can hope.
- **Myth:** Like the weather, society's institutions and processes are natural phenomena that human beings cannot affect. Society has always been like this, and it always will.
- **Myth:** Running the country is a difficult job that is best left to the smart people who now run it. Ordinary people are too dumb or screwed up to run it.
- **Myth:** Elite interests (or cultural norms or emotional conditioning) are so powerful that ordinary people cannot overcome them. “You can't fight City Hall.”
- **Myth:** Progressive activists are impractical idealists.
- **Myth:** Progressive activists are dangerous radicals, influenced by weird, un-American ideas.
- **Myth:** Progressive activists are strange, deranged people trying to lure others to join their bizarre cults.

These societal myths are widely held across society. A stirring speech or a well-written leaflet may convince some people these myths are false. But most people will require much more persuasion at a deeper and more personal level with people they trust. Some will reject these myths only when they are disproved repeatedly through demonstrated activity.

Activists would thus need to spend considerable time talking directly with people. They must also create alternatives that thoroughly expose and contradict these myths. To persuade the staunchest skeptics, activists might need to model these alternatives personally for many years.

At the successful end of this sub-stage, a majority of the public would be both hopeful and justifiably upset. They would desire a good society, understand they do not currently have one, see that it is possible to have one, and realize there are no acceptable reasons they cannot have one. They would understand how the power structure, cultural

socialization, and emotional conditioning preserve the status quo, and they would find this state of affairs disturbing. They would be ready for significant change and sympathetic to those who were working for positive change. Large numbers would be inclined to devote some effort to work toward a good society. Many would be willing to join a progressive change organization.

B. BUILD ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH

In this stage, progressive activists would also build a network of thousands of progressive organizations that would develop extensive analyses and programs for change. As I see it, activists would work primarily with four kinds of organizations:

We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

(1) Most activists would form local groups dedicated to working for fundamental progressive change in their community. These

groups would raise the public's consciousness (as described above) and prepare to struggle with the power structure (as described below in Stage 3).

Like current grassroots organizations, these groups might be completely independent or, more likely, they would be loosely allied with state, national, or international organizations. However, by being relatively small and locally controlled, these groups would allow extensive dialog among their members and encourage democratic participation in determining the direction of the group. Through participation in their governance, each member would learn how to work with others and would develop the skills necessary for direct democracy.

As I envision it, these groups would also provide a basic support network for their members, capable of supplying physical, economic, or emotional aid. They would offer a sympathetic environment for people to overcome their emotional blocks and patterns of submission. They would also serve as a friendship community, allowing people to play and celebrate together.

Like grassroots groups today, some of these groups would probably focus on a single progressive issue, chosen because it best illuminates an important problem or offers the best opportunity for fundamental change. Other groups would have a broader focus, working for fundamental transformation on many issues. Some groups might constitute local chapters of a progressive political party.

(2) Some activists would work primarily with state, national, or international organizations, researching issues, lobbying officeholders to vote for progressive measures, or coordinating the work of local organizations.

(3) Other activists would work primarily with existing mainstream organizations (churches, labor unions, professional societies, civic clubs, service organizations, political parties). They would push these organizations to work for fundamental reforms. Within these organizations they might form study groups, social action committees, or pro-

gressive caucuses. They would work to persuade individual members to adopt a more progressive outlook and would work to shift the organization toward a more progressive stance.

(4) Still other activists would devote their efforts to establishing a variety of alternative institutions inspired by progressive ideals: cooperative businesses, cooperative households or communities, humane social service agencies, volunteer police, fire, or rescue groups, alternative radio stations, community television stations, and so forth. To bring about fundamental change, they would choose to build alternatives that undercut the control of the power elite and redirected resources toward progressive change. For example, the currently existing company, Working Assets Long Distance, provides long distance telephone service. However, unlike its competitors, it places its advertising in alternative magazines and contributes one percent of its total revenue to progressive organizations.

Small, Grassroots Organizations

To create a good society, some activists must work in Washington, DC, New York, and other centers of political and economic power where they can directly influence decision-makers. However, to build a widespread, democratic movement for progressive change, most activists must work at the local level where they can involve large numbers of ordinary people and steadily build broad organizations. Ideally, some activists would live in every community in the United States so they could personally engage and influence every person in the country. Moreover, to build democracy, activists must be free to pursue their own political interests and work for change in whatever diverse ways they choose.

Activists could accomplish these two objectives if they worked primarily in small, locally based organizations. By keeping their groups autonomous and relatively small, they could evade outside interference and avoid stifling bureaucracy.

These small, grassroots groups would need to work with each other only when larger campaigns demanded collective strength. At those times, they could come together in loose coalitions and confederations. Each local group might affiliate with several different regional or issue-oriented alliances and work closely with or more independently of each depending on circumstances.

Eventually, to form a cohesive force capable of society-wide transformation, a large number of coalitions and alliances would need to coordinate their activities. Weaving these many diverse threads into a coherent tapestry would require, of course, a great deal of communication and cooperation. But this is exactly what a good society would also require, so this arrangement would serve as a precedent and prototype of a good society.

Over time, these activists would work together to build large networks, alliances, or political parties connecting these many grassroots groups and counter-institutions.²

At the successful end of Stage 2, hundreds of thousands of progressive activists would be working for fundamental change as members of thousands of organizations all over the country. Together, these groups would be large and strong enough to challenge vigorously the power structure and destructive social norms.

Built on the strong base established in Stage 1, these groups would be more numerous and more powerful than progressive change organizations were in the 1960s and 70s. They would also be considerably more stable. Having significantly affected most of the public in this stage, they would be poised to work for much deeper and broader change in Stage 3.

3. Struggle for Power

In the third stage, activists would use their organizational strength to undermine oppressive institutions and replace them with viable alternatives.

A. CHALLENGE THE POWER STRUCTURE THROUGH CONVENTIONAL POLITICAL AND LEGAL METHODS

Progressive activists and their supporters would elect progressive candidates to office and pass referenda that enacted progressive legislation. They would lobby legislators and administrators to enact progressive measures and they would sue oppressive institutions. With an understanding of the need for fundamental and systemic change, they would demand reforms that created more democracy and less oppression. They would do their best to avoid diversions, unpalatable compromises, token reforms, and counter-productive measures. Whenever the existing political system was unresponsive, activists would push more directly, as described in the next sub-stage.

B. ILLUMINATE DOMINATION AND OPPRESSION

Just as in the civil rights movement of the early 1960s, activists would directly challenge the status quo in ways that dramatized the inadequacy and cruelty of present norms and institutions while demonstrating the superiority of alternatives. When possible, they would stage dramatic demonstrations that placed opponents in a no-win dilemma: forcing their opponents to make substantive progressive change or showing them to be unresponsive and oppressive, which would undercut the legitimacy of their authority.

For example, thousands of people could publicly refuse to pay that part of their taxes that goes to subsidize large corporations. Instead, they could pay an equivalent amount directly to alternative organizations that provide social services for children or battered women. If the government harassed these people, it would show the government is more interested in subsidizing corporations than helping

needy people. If the government left them alone, they could continue to redirect money to truly beneficial uses.

Demonstrations like this would also shatter societal myths that hide oppressive realities. As an example, consider the relatively mild demonstrations of the early 1960s when black people quietly stood in line at voting booths. As they waited to vote, they were ignored, driven away, or beaten. Their simple act contradicted the societal myth that they did not want to or were too lazy to vote. Moreover, it revealed the truth that the local authorities did not allow them to vote and often harshly repressed them if they tried. Their responsible, nonviolent action stood in stark contrast to the violent and immoral response of the authorities.

By nonviolently promoting freedom, compassion, and other progressive ideals, activists would illuminate the possibilities and inspire others to action. When elite interests fought back, their actions would highlight the moral bankruptcy of the existing order and the greed, tyranny, cruelty, and violence at its core. By boldly standing up for what is right, activists would also grow emotionally stronger and see more clearly how their own socialization and emotional conditioning held them back.

If carried out in ways that clearly contrasted progressive ideals and alternatives with the violence and inequity of current norms and institutions, these actions would likely win support from large numbers of people. These people would then increase the pressure for change. Many defenders of the status quo would begin to withdraw their support. Some might deliberately carry out their duties inefficiently, or they might stop doing them altogether.

After years of constant agitation, even those most intensively indoctrinated and those paid well to prop up the power structure would begin to waver and defect. Without their support, the power of the elite would erode.

C. FIGHT OPPRESSION USING NONVIOLENT ACTION

As organizations working for fundamental progressive change grew in size, they would mount mass boycotts, strikes, and blockades to challenge thoroughly the power of elite interests. Ever larger numbers of people would refuse to support or tolerate the existing order. Organized crowds would banish drug dealers and thugs from their neighborhoods. Citizens would refuse to pay taxes that sustained exploitation or corruption. People would boycott useless or low-quality products and products or services offered by exploitative companies. They would picket and blockade factories and offices and denounce unresponsive managers. Workers

As long as our social order regards the good of institutions rather than the good of men, so long will there be a vocation for the rebel. — Richard Roberts

Power concedes nothing without a demand, it never has and it never will.
— Frederick Douglass

would strike for fair wages, reasonable working conditions, control over what they produce and how they produce it. People would confront racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression at the personal, community, state, national, and international level.

Millions of people refusing to provide support would severely undermine existing structures. These structures either would collapse or be forced to change dramatically.

D. DEVELOP POPULAR ALTERNATIVE INSTITUTIONS

In this stage, a large number of people would also embrace counter-institutions and drop their support for old institutions. As alternative institutions grew, they would provide essential services and displace current institutions. These alternative institutions would eventually become the primary institutions.³

Alternative institutions would probably include organic farms, cooperative businesses (consumer- or worker-owned), publicly-controlled free hospitals and medical clinics, co-housing, publicly financed mass transportation, bicycle

lanes, progressive schools, reuse and recycling centers, local currencies (like Ithaca Dollars), and so on.

In the early years of this stage, most efforts for change would probably have minimal effect. Much of the activity would be symbolic in nature, designed primarily to raise consciousness and erode support of destructive conventional institutions. However, over time, with enough support at enough levels, change activities would begin to challenge the existing order. Workers would refuse to work until their demands were met. Police officers would refuse to arrest strikers and blockaders, enabling activists to shut down oppressive and exploitive institutions. Troops would refuse to back up the police.

News reporters would demand to cover important news from the perspective of citizens (not the elite) and to report the unvarnished truth. Voters would oust corrupt and reactionary politicians, replacing them with honest progressives.

Eventually, alternative institutions would be large enough to provide all necessary services. Drug rehabilitation centers would grow capable of serving every addict. Alternative banks would provide capital to those who truly needed funding. Progressive doctors and clinics would provide care to those who most needed it, not just to those who could pay. Consumers would buy from progressive businesses that provided useful and well-made products, produced by well-paid workers in factories that produced no toxic wastes. People would only support churches that acted in harmony with their ideals. They would only attend sporting events that encouraged cooperation and esteem building. Muckrakers and police would focus on eradicating corruption in high places. People would divert their taxes directly to useful services. Progressive officeholders would raise taxes for the wealthy and lower them for the poor.

At the successful end of Stage 3 (after several decades), progressive activists would be able to shut down large parts of society with broad boycotts, mass blockades, and general strikes. Existing institutions would collapse and vast numbers of people would shift their allegiance to alternative institutions. Politicians would scramble to implement progressive measures or be replaced by those who would.

4. Diffuse Change Throughout Society

In this last stage, progressive change would spread to every corner of society. Alternative institutions and progressive cultural norms would completely replace the old. Young people would expect and demand honesty, fairness, and democracy. Outmoded attitudes would fade away as the few remaining people who clung to them eventually died.

Society would shield children from oppression and violence. Virtually every child would grow up without experiencing horrible emotional trauma. They would learn the

You see things, and you say "Why?" But I dream things that never were, and I say "Why not?"

— George Bernard Shaw

Practical Alternatives

Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example. — Mark Twain

Nothing undercuts justifications for the status quo better than the vivid demonstration of practical alternatives. To effectively promote fundamental change, an alternative must address the real needs of people. It must fulfill all the functions of a current practice or institution at least as well as the existing one, but do it more fairly, compassionately, and democratically. For example, most people would be reluctant to drop their support for the police, the prison system, and the military until progressives could show humane alternatives that were still as effective in protecting people from crime and tyranny.

To dispel myths of powerlessness, good alternatives must clearly demonstrate that ordinary citizens can responsibly assume power and run society's institutions better than the elite now do.

Building alternative institutions and demonstrating alternative behavior is, of course, quite difficult. In the beginning of the transformation process, activists can demonstrate only their own personal behavior, their own cooperative ways of interacting, their own nonviolent methods of struggle, and the few small-scale alternative institutions they have built. However, as progressive movements grew, activists would be able to develop and implement new laws, new kinds of relationships, and impressive alternative institutions. Once implemented, these more exciting and inviting models would attract a great deal of attention and acceptance.

skills necessary to practice democracy, freedom, and citizenship. Everyone would learn nonviolent change skills as part of her normal education, and any efforts to re-institute oppressive institutions would be countered by large num-

bers of people using these skills. People would also travel to other countries to help activists in other places overcome oppression, build alternative institutions, and transform their societies.

Figure 5.1: Leadership Roles in Each Stage of Transformation

Stage	Primary Leadership Roles for Activists
1A. Find Other Progressives	<p>Personal Networker: Help concerned people find others of like mind</p> <p>Discussion Leader: Help people talk about their concerns</p>
1B. Learn About Change	<p>Teacher: Educate concerned people about the world and how to change it</p> <p>Visionary: Communicate visions of a good society</p>
1C. Learn and Practice Change Skills	<p>Guide: Teach and demonstrate specific progressive change skills</p>
1D. Form Supportive Communities	<p>Community Builder: Help activists build supportive and joyous communities</p> <p>Therapist: Help activists work through their emotional conditioning</p>
2A. Raise Consciousness	<p>Lecturer/Writer/Performer/Artist: Teach people the truth about the way the world works and how to change it</p> <p>Agitator: Encourage people to challenge and question</p> <p>Firebrand: Amplify and direct discontent</p> <p>Trailblazer: Demand a good society and demonstrate what it would look like by zealously living it</p>
2B. Build Organizational Strength	<p>Organizer: Build cohesive cooperative organizations, establish democratic procedures, develop programs</p> <p>Mentor: Teach and demonstrate how to work with others</p> <p>Organization Networker: Help organizations find each other and work together</p>
3A. Challenge the Power Structure through Conventional Political and Legal Methods	<p>Researcher: Investigate existing structures and alternative possibilities</p> <p>Lobbyist: Lobby officeholders for progressive change</p> <p>Campaign Worker: Campaign to elect progressive candidates to office or to pass referenda</p> <p>Politician: Run for office and, if elected, develop and promote progressive legislation</p> <p>Litigator: Prepare, file, and litigate lawsuits against harmful institutions</p>
3B. Illuminate Domination and Oppression	<p>Strategic Planner: Design effective demonstrations and campaigns</p> <p>Demonstrator: Picket and blockade organizations to illuminate oppression</p> <p>Supporter: Provide physical, emotional, and financial support to demonstrators</p>
3C. Fight Oppression Using Nonviolent Action	<p>Resister: Boycott, strike, and blockade oppressive organizations</p> <p>Coordinator: Coordinate the work of many progressive organizations</p>
3D. Develop Popular Alternative Institutions	<p>Entrepreneur: Build alternative institutions</p> <p>Pioneer: Patronize alternative institutions</p>
4. Diffuse Change Throughout Society	<p>Manager: Synthesize diverse ideas into workable policies; re-orient institutions</p> <p>Administrator: Implement policies through alternative institutions</p>

OVERLAPPING STAGES

Like other models, this development framework presents a simple outline of what would be an extremely complex reality. Though largely flowing in the order presented, the four stages of this grand strategy for fundamental transformation would overlap.

Note, too, that within this strategic program, each campaign for change, focused on a particular issue, constituency, institution, or goal, would also go through stages. These intermediate stages would probably be similar to the four described here, with people learning, raising others' consciousness, forming organizations, challenging the status quo, building alternatives, and implementing changes.⁴

Each progressive change organization might also go through similar overlapping stages over the course of its existence. Moreover, a single organization might simultaneously have committees involved in different stages. For example, a group might have an outreach committee focused on bringing in new activists and raising consciousness, a direct action committee focused on confrontation, a committee focused on building alternatives, and a transnational committee trying to carry the transformation process to other countries. In addition, each activist might go through similar overlapping stages of personal understanding and activity.⁵

This book focuses on the overall level of grand strategy. It concentrates primarily on the earlier stages, assuming that with the foundation in place, activists would further develop and implement the rest of the strategy.

LEADERSHIP ROLES FOR EACH STAGE

Leadership is essential for collective action. Through these different change stages, the kind of leadership required would vary. Figure 5.1 lists the primary leadership roles most needed in each stage.

*A leader is best
When people barely know he exists.
Not so good when people obey and acclaim him,
Worse when they despise him.
“Fail to honor people,
They fail to honor you.”
But of a good leader, who talks little,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
They will say, “We did this ourselves.”*

— Lao-tzu

TIERED STRUCTURE

This model of democratic transformation provides an outline, but who would actually initiate and sustain it? How would they work with each other?

As discussed in the last chapter, only a small number of people have the desire, skills, and resources to devote most of their time to positive change. Most people spend their time raising children, making a living, and living their daily lives. They can spend only a few hours each week learning about issues, learning how to bring about change, or actually working for it.

Consequently, change movements inevitably have a tiered structure. Typically, the leaders are well educated, skilled, and experienced, but few in number. They usually work long and hard for a small salary. Below them are a larger number of volunteers with less knowledge and fewer skills. They typically work a few hours a month and have a small amount of influence on the direction of the organization. A much larger number of people contribute money to change organizations, occasionally show up at educational meetings, events, and rallies, and call or write letters to elected officials. They usually have no control over the change organization.

Paralleling traditional political and business structures, those at the top of this hierarchy have the most power and those at the bottom have little. This hierarchy is not democratic and actually undermines efforts for democratization of society since people do not learn democratic methods, only how to follow and obey.

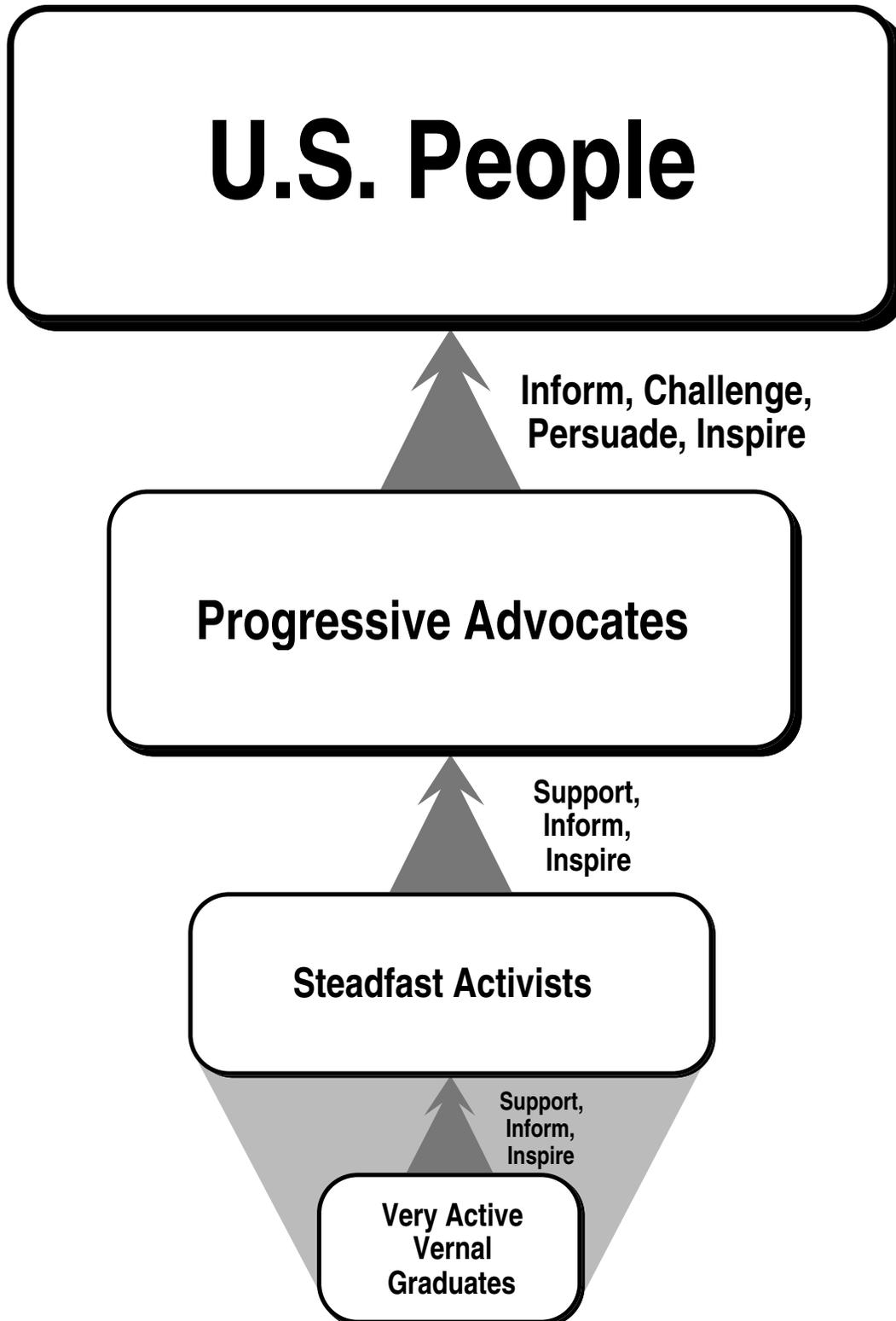
*Power without
responsibility
is oppressive.*

*Responsibility
without power
is depressing.*

Very Active Vernal Graduates

Figure 5.2 shows an alternative structure. The most involved activists would be at the bottom. As I envision it, this tier would consist of very active graduates of the Vernal Education Program (described in Chapter 6) who have agreed to work at least twenty hours per week for fundamental progressive change. Highly educated and skilled, these activists would provide leadership. However, because their overall focus would be building a broad, powerful, nonviolent, democratic grassroots movement, they would provide “leadership from below” — they would primarily support, inform, and inspire their progressive colleagues. They would participate in the decision-making process of their change organizations, but strictly on an equal footing with others or, perhaps, even from a behind-the-scenes position. This would allow less-experienced colleagues to take the lead.

Figure 5.2: A Democratically Structured Movement for Progressive Transformation



As much as possible, these skilled activists would mentor less-experienced activists and offer timely educational workshops on topics related to the work at hand. They would also provide emotional support and counseling to other activists to minimize infighting. Since these skilled and dedicated Vernal graduates might be the most active members of their organizations, they might also do much of the mundane work that others did not have the time or skills to do. Overall, they might devote as much as half of their change effort to supporting other activists.

Steadfast Activists

A larger number of steadfast activists, as shown on Figure 5.2, would work at least several hours per week for fundamental change. They would comprise the core of organizations working for progressive transformation. As described above in Stage 2B, I expect most of these activists would work with small, largely autonomous local organizations.

These steadfast activists would devote most of their time to active change work: persuading the public, lobbying public officials, lobbying church, labor, professional, and civic organizations, challenging political parties, building alternatives, confronting reactionary institutions, and so forth. However, they too would devote a substantial amount of their time to support, inform, and inspire progressive advocates (described below), especially by teaching democracy and change skills. They might

*Trust men and they will
be true to you; treat them
greatly and they will
show themselves great.*

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

spend a significant amount of their change time teaching and mentoring the progressive advocates associated with their organization.

Progressive Advocates

Progressive advocates would be a much larger number of people who were members or supporters of these many change organizations. Limited by family obligations, work obligations, a low level of skill or experience, or their fears of deeper commitment, progressive advocates would work at most a few hours per week for fundamental change. They might only occasionally attend their organization's meetings. However, because of their much larger numbers, these advocates would carry out a significant portion of progressive change activity. They would also provide much of the financial support for their group. In addition, they would likely constitute the main supporters of alternative institutions and would do much of the lobbying of public officials. They would comprise most of the people who attended rallies and engaged in other nonviolent activities.

However, their most critical change work would be simply talking with their relatives, friends, and neighbors about

the need for fundamental progressive change and how to go about it. They would inform, challenge, persuade, and inspire their acquaintances and the larger public. Many would hand out leaflets at county fairs and speak to school children, church groups, labor unions, and civic organizations on behalf of their progressive organization. Others might show progressive videos in their homes or set up study groups for their friends and neighbors.

In this model, small, local groups, comprised completely of very active Vernal graduates, steadfast activists, and progressive advocates, would be largely autonomous. They could work together with other local groups, forming coalitions and democratically structured alliances whenever advantageous. This decentralized structure would be much more democratic than most current progressive organizations and would promote democratic ideals.

Steadfast activists and very active Vernal graduates would have complete and equal governance over their small organizations. Progressive advocates would have an amount of control commensurate with the amount of responsibility they took on. Small groups would have ultimate power over larger alliances (instead of the other way around), and they would be free to disassociate from these alliances or even challenge them using the techniques of nonviolent struggle.*

Everyone

At the top of this structure would be all the people of the country — those who would ultimately make democratic decisions in a good society. As larger and larger numbers of people became involved in progressive change, the democratic structures of progressive groups would constitute the skeleton of a democratic structure for general governance of the country. When this progressive structure became the predominant structure, regular people would then govern our country democratically, not only in the political sphere, but also economically and socially.

Let me emphasize this point: In this model, progressive organizations would be governed democratically — with participation by all members and supporters. As these organizations grew in number, size, and influence, they would collectively wield increasing amounts of power over the important institutions of society. Eventually (at the end of Stage 4), they would exert influence over most aspects of society. Since they would operate democratically and in the common interest and they would support only democratic institutions, as they exerted increased power, the society as a whole would become more democratic and responsive to people's needs.

* Progressive caucuses within mainstream organizations that have hierarchical structures would be forced to play by the larger organization's rules. Still, internally, the caucuses could be egalitarian and democratic.

IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

When would this process of transformation begin? I believe it could start whenever we decide to begin.

Many sociologists who have studied the history of social movements argue that movements arise only under certain

Figure 5.3: Some Conditions and Events that May Trigger Political or Social Upheaval

Economic Conditions

- Adversity
- Prosperity
- Adversity Preceded by Prosperity

Psychological Conditions

- Discontent, Frustration (relative deprivation of achievements compared to aspirations)
- Alienation (loss of community)

Political Conditions

- Foreign Domination and Exploitation
- Governmental Inefficiency (deficits, corruption)
- Disintegration of the Ruling Elite (ineptitude, in-fighting)
- Elite Intransigence and Repression

Social Conditions

- Ideological Decay (social norms and values are no longer accepted)
- Institutional Decay (rigid institutions thwart people and groups)
- Social Disequilibrium (racial, gender, or class antagonism)
- Defection of Intellectuals (away from the elite)

Specific Events

- Power of Elite is Undermined (an election defeat, war, coup d'état, an army mutiny, etc.)
- Straining Event (economic disaster, famine, sudden growth or technological change, severe weather)
- Crackdown on Dissidents
- Terrorist Act
- Historical Accident

SOURCES: This list is based on a summary of many scholars' work provided by Mostafa Rejai, *The Strategy of Political Revolution* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Anchor Press, 1973, JC491 .R381), pp. 24–26, supplemented with the discussion in Anthony M. Orum, *Introduction to Political Sociology: The Social Anatomy of the Body Politic*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983, JA76 .O78 1983), pp. 318–337.

favorable conditions. Figure 5.3 lists some of the conditions and events these scholars have found historically precipitate social upheaval. However, one or another of these events occurs almost every year, yet major social upheavals occur much less often.

Other scholars argue that social movements come in cyclical waves, rising and falling as the pendulum of public opinion swings back and forth. They argue that a swing to the left frightens moderates, shifting them more to the right. Then the implementation of right-wing policies frightens moderates, causing them to swing to the left. These swings seem to occur on a regular basis, every thirty or forty years. This provides an explanation for the regular appearance of strong progressive political movements such as the Populist movement of the 1880s, the Progressive movement in the early part of the Twentieth century, the radical labor movement of the 1930s, and the civil rights/anti-war/youth movement of the 1960s.

Both of these perspectives focus on the take-off stage of social movements when they are most visible. However, most social movements have long preparatory stages when nothing appears to be happening, but important groundwork is being laid. For example, the civil rights movement emerged in the mid-1950s when most of the country had shifted towards conservatism. Historians can see that the powerful Montgomery bus boycott of 1955–56 — which led directly to the larger civil rights movement of the 1960s — was a probable next step after a decade of steady, grass-roots organizing, but it was a surprise for most people at the time.⁶

Preparatory work must be done long before social change movements become visible. Once they have taken off, there is little time to build important maintenance structures (like communities of support), for activists to learn important skills, or for activists to work through their cultural and emotional limitations. If we wait until the take-off stage, then it is usually too late to lay the groundwork.

Moreover, a fundamental transformation of all aspects of society will necessarily take decades to occur. During this long period, many social change movements will probably arise and fade. Waiting for a time when the political winds are blowing in a progressive direction could mean waiting a long time unnecessarily. There is no reason to wait — we can start the process of transformation whenever we want. We can start the process now.

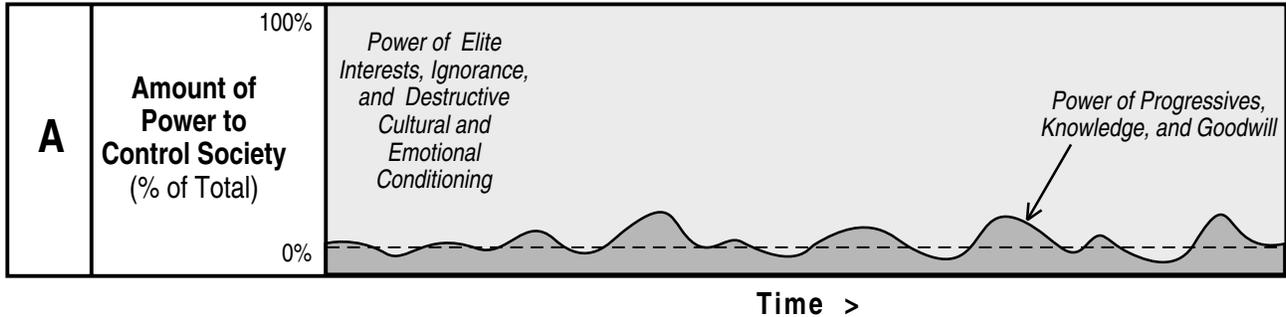
*This time, like all times,
is a very good one if we
but know what to do
with it.*

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

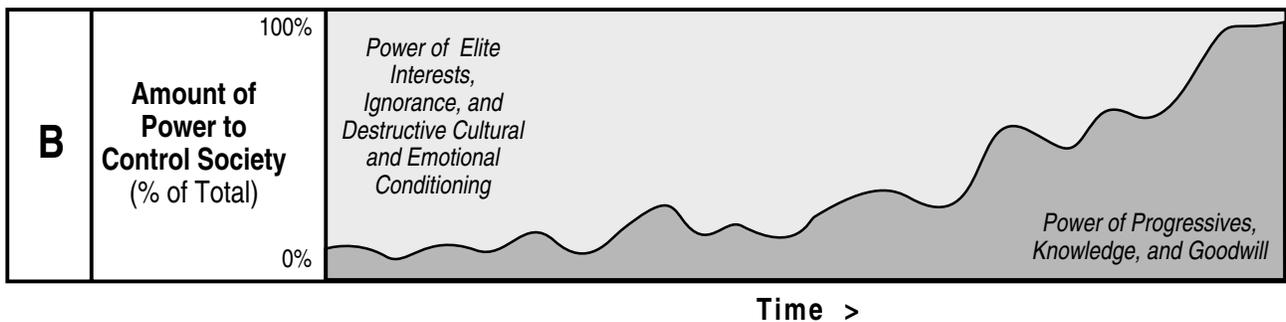
Certainly, over the course of the transformation process activists will accomplish more when conditions are favorable and less when conditions are inhospitable. Particular progressive movements may stagnate or falter in unfavorable periods — when most people are content with the status quo or feel hopeless, when elite interests are strong and united, or when

Figure 5.4: Representations of Societal Change Over Time

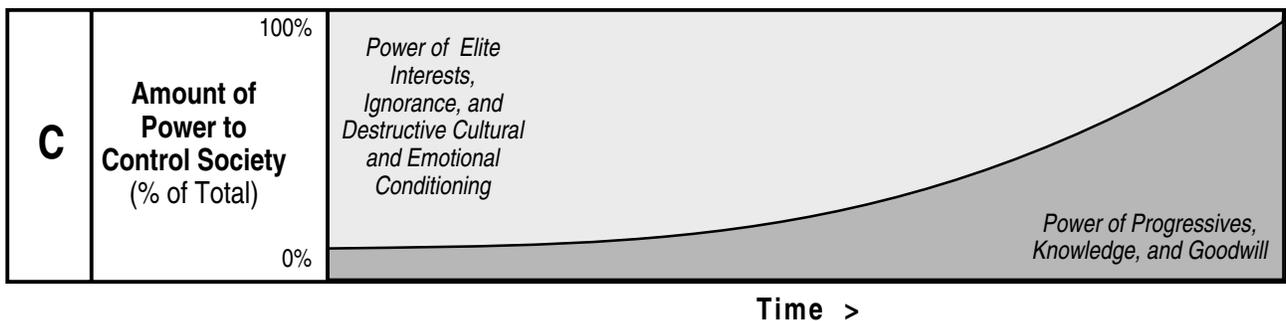
Normal (Cyclic) Shifts in Power Between Progressive and Anti-Progressive Forces



Fundamental Transformation Created by Massive Progressive Social Movements



Fundamental Transformation Created by Massive Movements Idealized Smooth Transition



progressive resources are scarce. During these periods, activists may have few victories. They may be forced to devote virtually all of their efforts to defending gains and minimizing losses. Still, if they have the skills, strength, and endurance to continue to work for change through these periods, then when conditions grow more favorable, their progressive social movements can soar. If activists' overall efforts over the decades are sufficiently strong, then eventually they can bring about a complete transformation of society.

The three diagrams in Figure 5.4 portray this perspective. The area under the line in each diagram represents the percentage of all power held by the forces working towards a

good society. The area above the line represents the relative power held over people by elite interests, by people's ignorance, and by destructive cultural and emotional conditioning. These diagrams indicate the potential shift between these forces over the decades.* When the line is near the bottom, it indicates that elite interests, ignorance, and destructive cultural and emotional conditioning dominate society. When the line is near the top of the diagram, it

* Note that I have not established the scale on the time axes of these diagrams. Conceivably, the duration of the diagrams might be as little as fifty years or as much as a thousand years.

indicates that we have achieved a democratic and non-oppressive society.

The top diagram shows “normal” changes caused by cyclic forces and by various triggering conditions and events. The fluctuations in the line indicate all the shifts due to technological changes, political elections, regular progressive reform movements, elite repression, right-wing movements, and so forth. When conditions are ripe, progressive social movements arise and cause some positive change. Later, when conditions grow unfavorable, these movements falter and the power of progressive forces declines. Though power shifts back and forth, progressive forces never have enough strength or skills to overcome the opposition, so the line oscillates near the bottom of the diagram (above and below the dotted line).

The middle diagram shows a similar oscillation, but in this case, progressive social movements are strong enough to create fundamental change. In this representation, the power of progressive forces eventually grows to almost one hundred percent, indicating a complete transformation of society. The curve has bumps and dips — analogous to those in the top diagram — caused by “normal” cyclic and triggered changes. However, because progressive social movements are more effective, they gain much more during the favorable periods and lose far less during the unfavorable periods. Over time, the curve shifts ever higher. Since the curve is generally rising, the percentage of power held by progressive forces after major setbacks in the later years is still greater than the highest peaks in the early years.

The middle diagram is probably a realistic rendering of the complexity of fundamental transformation since it indicates the actual successes and failures year to year. But clearly, it is impossible to predict the exact course of future events, what conditions and triggers might accelerate or decelerate progressive change, when these changes might occur, and the extent of their impact. So any diagram like this would necessarily have the bumps and dips in the wrong places and would show them with the wrong magnitude. The bumps and dips would also mask the overall shift.

For these reasons, I created the bottom diagram, which is an idealized version of the middle one.* It shows the same fundamental transformation over time, but omits “normal” cyclic and triggered changes and ignores the jumps and starts that characterize real change. Hence in this diagram, the line moves smoothly upward. Like the middle diagram, this one indicates that, at the beginning, the relative power of the forces working toward a good society is low. But as time goes on, it grows steadily to almost the entire total. Since earlier victories make it easier to bring about change, the line slopes a bit upward to show that change accelerates over time.

* Think of it as subtracting the top diagram from the middle. (To create the middle diagram, I actually added the bumps and dips from the top diagram to the bottom one.)

STRONG ENOUGH?

Historically, social change has followed the oscillatory pattern described in the top diagram. How can we ensure that it follows the path of progressive transformation described by one of the two bottom diagrams instead?

The next few chapters describe one practical way. But first let’s look in more depth at the dynamic of effective nonviolent struggle since it plays a crucial role in this program, and it is often misunderstood.

NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE

Many people equate nonviolence with passivity or capitulation. They consider it too gentle and weak to challenge the might of elite interests, the viciousness of soldiers trained to kill mindlessly, or the cruel malice of rapists and torturers. However, when practiced by a small group of dedicated and skilled activists, nonviolent action can disarm opponents, vividly expose injustice, and inspire people far and wide. When practiced by large numbers of people working together in a bold, incisive campaign, nonviolent engagement can undermine all support for powerholders and force sweeping change.

By its nature, principled nonviolent struggle promotes fairness, democracy, and compassion. When planned by skilled and conscientious leaders like Mohandas Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr. and carried out well, it has the extraordinary ability to overturn oppression without creating an oppressive counterforce. It de-escalates hostility, violence, and fear, reduces polarization, and ennobles both participants and opponents. It also promotes mutual problem solving based on real needs and reasonable desires, making it possible to develop appealing win-win solutions for everyone involved.

In this age of the rule of brute force, it is almost impossible for anyone to believe that anyone else could possibly reject the law of the final supremacy of brute force.

— Mohandas Gandhi

Nonviolent struggle, at its best, cuts through old behavior patterns and touches the caring human beings trapped inside. Like cathartic theater, nonviolent struggle can unearth buried hearts, rejuvenate shriveled souls, and awaken the playful and loving sides of people.

The Power of Nonviolent Struggle

Nonviolent struggle is effective because it ingeniously undercuts the power of oppressors. Even the most powerful

tyrants hold very little power as individuals — most of the power they wield is dependent on the support of thousands of others who actually carry out their desires and the passive acquiescence of millions of people who could intervene but do not.

For example, police have power because society imbues them with authority and grants them the right to use force.

The courts and city hall back them up. Their commanders and fellow police officers support their daily actions.

I am your king, and you'd better do what I say or else I can't be king anymore.

— cartoonist B. Kliban

Soldiers have power because society values their might, praises their willingness to fight, and authorizes their killing. Society also pays to support them using

tax money. Their officers train them, lead them, command them, and supply them with weapons.

Torturers may seem to be inhuman miscreants acting outside the bounds of sanctioned authority. However, they too are supported by a martial sub-culture and their actions may be covertly authorized by the government. Moreover, the larger society may passively support their actions if most people consider cruelty necessary to defeat “terrorists” or “subversives.”

Individuals have little power without institutional backing — only the power of their own muscles and wits plus whatever personal weaponry they may have acquired. To visualize the extent of this dependency, imagine the weakness of even the most powerful and affluent people if no one in society would provide them food. They would be forced to hunt, forage, or farm just to feed themselves. It is only because others agree to supply them with food that these “powerful” people do not live an enervating, hand-to-mouth existence.

Moreover, all people rely on others for reassurance that their actions are reasonable and morally justified. Even rapists rely on a general climate of misogyny to condone their conduct.

A well-designed nonviolent campaign undermines support for oppressors and challenges their destructive behavior. It encourages other people to stop passively consenting to oppressors’ demands and instead to actively dissent and intervene.

It encourages ethical leaders and the public to condemn their unsavory actions. It encourages the oppressors’ own family and friends to criticize them (as happened during the Vietnam War with Defense Secretaries Robert McNamara and Melvin Laird). A good campaign even attempts to awaken the consciences of the

Let me say, at the risk of seeming ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love. — Ché Guevara

oppressors so that whatever dormant empathy they might have for others will steer them toward more compassionate behavior. For example, McNamara actually resigned.

When large enough numbers of people condemn oppressors’ actions and refuse to cooperate with them, they are forced to capitulate. In like manner, when many people refuse to act according to harmful social norms or to act out their own harmful behavior patterns, they undercut the strength of those norms and dissolve the power of destructive patterns. Over the course of a nonviolent campaign, as principled resistance grows, more and more people take control of their own lives and take back control of their society. Power shifts from oppressive tyrants to cooperative and compassionate people and from oppressive norms and institutions to ones that are more humane.

To be effective, nonviolent struggle must induce enough people to dissent, refuse, and intervene.

Some people can be persuaded by rational discussion, compelling leaflets, passionate speeches, vigils, marches, parades, rallies, and similar activities. For example, in a campaign to stop production of land mines, activists might stage a rally at the gates of the land mine factory with poignant speeches from prominent moral leaders and moving testimonials from people who had lost limbs to land mines. This might stir the consciences of some workers in the factory to seek other employment.

Small, symbolic boycotts and physical interventions can illuminate injustice and inspire people to end their support. For example, a die-in and mock funeral with hundreds of wailing widows dressed in black would dramatize the misery caused by land mines.

Larger, more personal actions can place key players in a pivotal situation where they must either sever their support for oppressors or exert extra

effort to go on. Continuing this example, thousands of activists might blockade the gates of the land mine factory by lying closely together on the ground. This

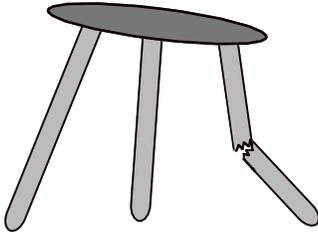
He that complies against his will Is of his own opinion still.

— Samuel Butler

would force workers to decide whether going to work was worth having to walk on the protesters’ bodies. Many would not take this hurtful step.

In this example, progressive activists directly sway workers to stop producing land mines. But nonviolent struggle more often brings about change indirectly. For example, the demonstration against the land mine factory may directly influence only a few workers, but it might induce friends and neighbors of the workers to criticize them. This might prod them enough that they would seek new jobs. More likely, such a demonstration might induce thousands of people across the country to call their congressional representatives, pressuring them to cut funding for the land mine factory. Alternatively, the demonstration might induce people to boycott other products of the company that makes land mines. This might put enough economic pres-

sure on the company to force it to convert the factory to another use.*



Just as a stool with a broken leg topples over, a power structure collapses without the support of the people who formerly sustained it. Nonviolent campaigns that appear to target powerholders are more often aimed at cracking their support, so they will tumble off their thrones of power.

Elements of Effective Nonviolent Campaigns

Nonviolent struggle campaigns can only induce large numbers of people to dissent and refuse if those campaigns seek to move society in a direction that people find appealing. Nonviolent struggle requires that activists stand up for what is right, take risks, bear suffering without retaliation, and act honestly and openly, even when secrecy might seem desirable. They must avoid being hostile, arrogant, or self-righteous.

Effective nonviolent struggle campaigns include these elements:

- They have fair and just goals, inclusive of everyone.
- They rely on compassion and a desire for democracy and fairness — not on malice or vengeance.
- They boldly and openly stop oppression without demeaning or physically injuring the oppressors. They support every person involved in the campaign as an individual human being.
- They address the root causes of problems and suggest far-reaching remedies that can actually solve them.
- They illuminate a wide spectrum of facts and perspectives and convey them to the larger community in an understandable fashion.
- They promote rational dialog.
- They encourage people to think for themselves.
- They embrace a multiplicity of truths.
- They accept the possibility that everyone may be misguided or wrong (including progressive activists).
- They are experimental and tentative, oriented toward finding the best solution among many possible choices rather than imposing a preconceived answer.

The best nonviolent actions are playful, joyous, and inspiring. They use creative activities that break through rigid

* There are several other ways to increase the effort required to produce land mines: if workers could find jobs nearby that paid higher wages, they would probably choose to take those jobs. If the land mine company could make larger profits by producing some other product, then it would probably stop production. Development of an effective nonviolent national defense program would undercut the rationale for building land mines.

behavior patterns and open people up to new modes of thinking and acting. They forcefully challenge oppression and offer superior alternatives.

Steps in Nonviolent Campaigns

Effective nonviolent campaigns often span many years, require immense preparation, and proceed through many steps. Typically, activists will first investigate a persistent social problem and research a variety of possible solutions. They will then communicate their findings to the public and build organizations to lobby or sue authorities for change. Next, to build widespread understanding and support, they speak out, distribute leaflets, publish newsletters, post websites, perform guerrilla theater, debate their opponents, and so forth. While most activists usually press for change through conventional channels, others may illuminate the oppression through public protest or symbolically enact an alternative to demonstrate its superiority.

If opponents are not responsive, activists prepare for more intensive nonviolent struggle. Typically, they first educate even more people about the issue and build an action organization. They inform their opponents of their intentions and attempt to negotiate a solution. If their opponents are still unresponsive, then activists may picket, fast, and hold large marches or rallies to dramatize the issue and expose their opponents' unresponsiveness. They may also pressure their opponents' colleagues and friends.

As part of their effort, activists might also perform community service to exhibit their compassion and demonstrate they are willing to do concrete tasks necessary to create a good society. They may praise opponents' positive efforts or even offer them gifts to express goodwill, show integrity, and allay opponents' fears of being attacked.

It is usually only after all these steps — preparation that bolsters the strength and resolve of activists and undercuts the rationale and legitimacy of their opponents — that activists engage in coercive strikes, blockades, or boycotts to force authorities to capitulate.

Typical Steps in a Nonviolent Campaign

1. Background research and investigation
2. Widespread education
3. Negotiation with the powerholders
4. Demonstrations that illuminate the oppression and offer alternatives
5. Outreach to enlist the support of more people
6. Community service and goodwill gestures towards the powerholders and the larger community
7. Nonviolent noncooperation and intervention

Naturally, these strong challenges to the status quo often stimulate a violent backlash. However, if activists remain true to their ideals and respond nonviolently, then public opinion tends to swing behind them. An organized public then lobbies authorities, and this broad and strong pressure finally forces positive change.

Preparing for a Nonviolent Action

A large nonviolent action can take many months of preparation. Activists must persuade large numbers of peo-

ple to attend, arrange transportation to the demonstration site, and provide for their basic needs for food, water, toilet, and shelter.

Even more important, activists must ensure that the action is purposeful, creative, and potent so it will be effective in swaying the public. If the goal is to illuminate injustice and foster public pressure for change, then activists try to expose the social myths that obscure reality and sustain conventional beliefs. They devise actions to counter these myths.

Creative Nonviolent Action

Mr. Skeptic: Ok, Ms. Promoter of Nonviolence, how would you deal with a real-world situation. Let's say I'm walking down a dark street late at night in the grungy part of town, and a big man pulls a knife on me and demands I hand over my wallet. What should I do?

Ms. Promoter of Nonviolence: Well, you might do many things. What options do you see?

Mr. Skeptic: I don't see any possibilities at all. It's a scary situation. I guess I could fight him and try to knock the knife out of his hand. If I knew karate or some other martial art, I might be able to overpower him. But these aren't very nonviolent. The only nonviolent option I see would be to just give in and hand over my wallet.

Ms. NV: Well, actually there are many other nonviolent options. For example, perhaps you could run away, or you could scream at the top of your lungs. Let's be more creative. Maybe you should shout that there is a fire, point at this imaginary fire, and run towards it. The mugger might be surprised just long enough for you to get away. Or perhaps you could introduce yourself to him and try to shake his hand. Maybe you could run up to him and give him a big hug. Or maybe you should fall to the ground and act like you're having an epileptic fit.

What if you said some crazy things about the Queen forcing you to use drugs and then sprinkled imaginary pixie dust on your head? Or what if you got down on your hands and knees and crawled between his legs. What if you started to sing Mary Had a Little Lamb and did a little jig? What if you complimented his clothing and gave him a gift — what if you wrote him a poem and gave it to him? Maybe you should ask him for his autograph.

Mr. S: None of those seem like good ideas to me.

Ms. NV: Well perhaps not, but the point is that there are a lot of options — a lot more than you came up with. They may seem crazy, but some of them might be useful in re-arranging the situation. Creative nonviolent action often works by transforming a bad situation where everyone is playing a conventional role into a new situation where

everyone has to play by new rules. It forces people to step out of their normal, patterned behavior. Once people are thinking, they may discover a more appropriate way to act.

There may even be some sort of mutually satisfactory solution. Perhaps this mugger has never been given a poem before and your gesture would open his heart. Maybe introducing yourself would transform the situation from “mugger robbing victim” to a situation more like two friends talking together on the street. Robbery would then seem out of place and impolite. Perhaps not. But the point is to come up with a lot of ideas and then evaluate whether they would work. If you don't, then you have already surrendered to your fear. You are forced to play by the rules of a bad game...

Let me tell you a story: once, at a demonstration at the Rocky Flats nuclear bomb trigger factory, the police, with their nightsticks drawn, started to rush towards a group of demonstrators. The demonstrators, realizing they might be beaten, began to play the hokey-pokey. The police, when confronted by a bunch of people playing a children's game, did not know what to do. In their eyes, the demonstrators had transformed from “dirty communists” to young people just like their sons and daughters. Before the demonstrators played the hokey-pokey, it didn't seem like a very good idea to avoid being beaten; but after it worked, it seemed brilliant.

Mr. S: These ideas still don't seem workable to me.

Ms. NV: Well perhaps not. The situation you described is a tough and scary one. There may be no good solutions. Perhaps the mugger is deranged and desperate for money to buy drugs. Perhaps he will rob and kill you no matter what you do.

Maybe the only solution is for you not to be there late at night — or even better, for there not to be a grungy part of town at all. Perhaps the real solution is to work now to ensure that no part of town is grungy and there are no deranged drug addicts desperately stalking the streets looking for victims they can rob for drug money.

For example, to counter the myth that the military is starved for funds, activists could create a giant physical chart on a downtown street with the percentage of income taxes going to the military represented by hundreds of rifles lined up end-to-end for hundreds of yards. They might represent the much smaller percentage of taxes that go to education with books lined up for a few feet. After displaying this proof of misplaced priorities, activists might pick up these props. Those who picked up rifles could pretend to shoot those holding books who would dramatically “die.” This action would graphically depict the priorities and predictable consequences of current government policy.

If the goal is to coerce powerholders to change directly, then activists determine whom they can most feasibly compel

and how they can best pressure them. For example, activists might seek to stop a company from producing a product that it sells only overseas, like infant formula. They might determine that they could coerce the influential marketing vice-president

The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any. — Alice Walker

by launching a broad consumer boycott of another product that it sells domestically.

To be effective, progressive activists must ensure that participants refrain from harsh or vindictive behavior and focus instead on challenging their opponents boldly and compassionately. Toward this goal, organizers of a nonviolent direct action often draw up guidelines for behavior. They may require participants to join an “affinity group” — like-minded people who support each other and can ensure that each member adheres to the guidelines. Organizers usually require all activists to attend a workshop to learn

bold, nonviolent responses to conflict by practicing these skills in simulations and role-plays.

An effective action is thus well planned and the participants are well prepared. Activists often choreograph the whole demonstration like a theater or dance performance. They carefully craft it to bring out everyone’s best character, touch hearts, illuminate destructive behavior, and pose alternatives that are more effective and humane.

Structure and planning do not preclude individual spontaneity or initiative. To the contrary, innovative responses will arise freely in a safe, alternative environment. In such surroundings, people are more likely to step out of their patterned behavior and address the situation at hand with compassion and intelligence. This fresh thinking is exciting and energizing.

At its best, a powerful nonviolent action profoundly affects all participants — activists, opponents, and bystanders. An effective action often feels new, magical, and unique, yet

ageless and just right. Participants and observers may suddenly see new possibilities and imagine new vistas. They may feel a compassionate understanding of others — even those who have oppressed them. Participants may even feel — for the first time — genuine joy and delight in the world.

The Danger of Nonviolent Struggle

If planned and carried out well, nonviolent struggle can be effective against even the most hardened and highly armed troops. By demanding change in ways that do not endanger anyone, nonviolent struggle reduces opponents’ hostility and undercuts justifications for violent response. Hence, compared to warfare, nonviolent struggle is relatively safe.

Still, struggle of any kind can be deadly. Current institutions are dedicated to resisting substantive change with the full range of their arsenals. When challenged, they may respond with deadly force — remember the killings at Kent State and Tiananmen Square.

Moreover, since nonviolent actions are designed to jiggle people’s rigid patterns, even a mild action can evoke an intense reaction. Some opponents and bystanders may respond with tears, elation, or excited realization when they see high ideals and practical solutions visibly demonstrated. But others may react with fear or fierce rage. By anticipating the latter, activists can sometimes counteract it with compassion, logic, or creative maneuvers, or they may be able to stand to the side so that the rage goes harmlessly past them (like an aikido move). Still, at times, activists must take the full brunt of the fury. The best actions are planned with a deep understanding of human dynamics and carried out skillfully to keep responses within bounds and minimize casualties.

Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.
— Anais Nin

Tips for Action

Redirect your anger into positive action. Convert your fear into excitement. Stand tall on your principles. And don't forget to have fun!

The Goal is Positive Change

Something seems wrong to most people engaged in struggle when they see more people hurt on their own side than on the other side. They are used to reading this as an indication of defeat, and a complete mental readjustment is required of them. Within the new terms of struggle, victory has nothing to do with their being able to give more punishment than they take (quite the reverse); victory has nothing to do with their being able to punish the other at all; it has to do simply with being able, finally, to make the other move... Vengeance is not the point; change is.

— Barbara Deming⁷

Twelve Principles of Strategic Nonviolent Struggle

Recently, two scholars studied six historical society-wide battles to determine the major factors, subject to activists' control, that contribute to success or failure of a nonviolent struggle.⁸ Since their analysis was not oriented towards the particular goal of creating a good society, they did not conclude that nonviolent campaigns must be morally consistent with a good society or that campaigns must garner widespread support. Still, the results of their study are notable. They concluded that a nonviolent struggle would be more likely to succeed if it conforms to these twelve strategic principles:

Development (prior to the conflict, create a favorable environment)

1. Formulate Functional Objectives — Choose a clear, specific goal towards which all decisions are made.
2. Develop Organizational Strength — Build an efficient struggle organization with strong and flexible leadership, a skilled and dedicated activist operational corps, and a sympathetic and supportive civilian population.
3. Secure Access to Critical Material Resources — Ensure that activists have food, clothing, energy, medical supplies, computers, and so on.
4. Cultivate External Assistance — Get other countries or outside groups to support your cause and provide aid.
5. Expand the Repertoire of Sanctions — Prepare a large number of possible tactics in advance and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses for various circumstances.

Engagement (during the struggle, maximize the effect of your actions)

6. Attack the Opponents' Strategy for Consolidating Control — Refuse to obey whatever your opponents want obeyed. Subvert the enforcers (police, troops).
7. Mute the Impact of the Opponents' Violent Weapons — Get away, disable their weapons, prepare your supporters for the worst so they are not terrorized or demoralized when it comes, and so on.
8. Alienate Opponents from Expected Bases of Support — Make your opponents' violence and their goals appear unconscionable so they are condemned internally, by their allies, and by other countries.
9. Maintain Nonviolent Discipline — Keep your behavior (and that of your allies) within acceptable limits to reduce any justification for your opponents' violence and to undermine their support. Distance yourself from those who use violence to "help" you.

Conception (as the struggle continues, evaluate what is happening)

10. Assess Events and Options in Light of Levels of Strategic Decision Making — Realistically assess the struggle on the appropriate level (policy, operational planning, strategy, tactics, and logistics) and respond accordingly. Especially, do not confuse a tactical win with an overall victory or a tactical loss with an overall defeat.
11. Adjust Offensive and Defensive Operations According to the Relative Vulnerabilities of the Protagonists — Depending on the circumstances, focus on undercutting your opponents, or switch to defending your own support structures. Also, strike in many places with many tactics or focus on a few vulnerable spots.
12. Sustain Continuity Between Sanctions, Mechanisms, and Objectives — Use appropriate methods to steer your opponents to the desired end: conversion, accommodation, coercion, or disintegration of their power base.

SUMMING UP

The previous chapter specified crucial characteristics of democratic change efforts and six essential components of an effective strategy. By relying on broad educational efforts, mass change movements, a decentralized and democratic organizational structure, and nonviolent struggle, the strategic program described in this chapter includes all of these characteristics and components. If thoroughly implemented, I believe this strategic program would produce a good society.

The next five chapters describe a practical way to implement this strategic program over eighty years. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 focus on the first two stages. These chapters describe a specific endeavor — the Vernal Education Project — to increase greatly the strength, knowledge, skills, and endurance of progressive activists and their organizations. Chapter 9 shows that with this increased capability, activists could realize the third and fourth stages and actually bring about fundamental transformation of society. Chapter 10 lays out a specific timeline for developing and implementing the Vernal Education Project.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 5

¹ I have drawn on several previous works that examine revolutionary change and major paradigm shifts.

Rex D. Hopper, “The Revolutionary Process: A Frame of Reference for the Study of Revolutionary Movements,” *Social Forces*, 28, No. 3 (March 1950): pp. 270–279, synthesizes the research of several earlier scholars on the “natural history” of revolutionary change. He divides the process into four main stages, based primarily on the psychological state of the public:

- The Preliminary Stage of individual restlessness.
- The Popular Involvement Stage of collective unrest and excitement.
- The Formal Stage when people develop a collective opinion about the new social order and try to implement it.
- The Institutional Stage when the new order is successfully implemented.

The Formal stage covers the dramatic part of a revolution — the phase generally considered “the Revolution.” My stages 2A, 2B, 3, and 4 roughly correspond to Hopper’s four stages, though again note that my model focuses on the work of activists while Hopper’s model focuses on the psychological state of the public.

William H. Friedland, et al., *Revolutionary Theory* (Totowa, NJ: Allanheld, Osmun, 1982, JC491 .F73), pp. 126–130, lists four basic elements of revolutionary mobilization:

- Raising Consciousness
- Increasing Participation
- Undermining the System
- Building and Sustaining the Revolutionary Organization

In the introduction to his stirring history of the Populist Movement of the 1880s and 1890s, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, E661 .G672 1978), pp. xviii–xxii, Lawrence Goodwyn suggests four stages for democratic movement building:

- Formation
- Recruitment
- Education
- Politicization

In the Formation stage, the movement creates an autonomous institution where new interpretations of how to live can materialize that run counter to those of the prevailing authority — a “counter-culture.” In the Recruitment stage, the movement finds a tactical way to recruit large numbers of people. In the Education stage, the movement educates its constituents and inculcates a high level of social analysis. In the Politicization stage, the movement expresses its power in an autonomous political way such as through a powerful political party able to win elections.

Goodwyn points out that a successful movement must be initiated by people who have individually attained a high level of personal political self-respect — people who are not resigned and cannot be intimidated. Then, in the last three stages, there must be

democratic methods for widespread communication within the mass movement to counter the misinformation and propaganda put out by elite interests and the dominant culture. This democratic communication is necessary to allow participants to develop collective self-confidence in their new way of doing things. With individual self-respect and collective self-confidence, people then make their own “movement culture.”

Goodwyn sees the Populists’ development of extensive bottom-up farming cooperatives as an essential first step because it let large numbers of people see a workable democratic alternative to the status quo. These cooperatives were subsequently undermined by the power elite, providing a deep political lesson for all those involved. The Populists’ lecturing system — which involved up to 40,000 lecturers traveling across the country — offered an excellent (though clearly not sufficient) means of communicating these political lessons to large numbers of people.

In the Populist Movement example, Goodwyn’s four stages appear to correspond to my stages 3D (or perhaps 1D), 2B, 2A, and 3A. But actually, the entire populist movement probably represents a single individual campaign (admittedly an enormous one) within my Stage 3 (see my discussion in the section called “Overlapping Stages”).

In contrast, his four theoretical stages roughly correspond to my Stages 1, 2B, 2A, and 3. My Stage 1 also addresses Goodwyn’s observation that a movement must be initiated by individuals with a high level of understanding and self-respect. My Stage 2 includes his observation about the need for democratic methods of internal communication and the need to develop collective self-confidence.

The strategic program specified in this chapter most closely follows the nonviolent revolutionary process described by George Lakey in *Powerful Peacemaking: A Strategy for a Living Revolution* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1987); revised version of *Strategy for a Living Revolution* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973, HM278 .L32 1973). He devotes a chapter to each of his five stages. I consider the ideas in his chapters 1 and 8 as additional developmental stages, making seven in all. Lakey’s chapters correspond to the stages in this book approximately as follows:

Stages in this Book	Lakey’s Chapters
1. Lay the Groundwork	1. Empowering Ourselves for Peace
2A. Raise Consciousness	3. Cultural Preparation
2B. Build Organizational Strength	4. Building Organizational Strength
3A. Challenge the Power Structure through Conventional Political and Legal Methods	—
3B. Illuminate Domination and Oppression	5. Propaganda of the Deed
3C. Fight Oppression Using Nonviolent Action	6. Political and Economic Non-cooperation
3D. Develop Popular Alternative Institutions	7. Intervention and Parallel Institutions
4. Diffuse Change Throughout Society	8. The World in Revolution

Note that Lakey's Chapter 2 provides several excellent historical examples of successful nonviolent struggles.

My ideas about nonviolent revolution have also been greatly influenced by Susanne Gowan, George Lakey, William Moyer, and Richard Taylor, *Moving Toward a New Society* (Philadelphia: New Society Press, 1976, HN65 .M65).

² Marxist Ronald Aronson points out that a society-transforming movement must be quite diverse, but everyone must also have a deep understanding of all the many kinds of oppression:

Perhaps the various forms of oppression can still be located within some single world-historical dialectical spiral, but the movements opposing them are autonomous and plural by nature, each seeking to undo specific, however interrelated, forms of oppression, each requiring an understanding that respects its specificity. The fundamental fact is that any large-scale movement today or in the future, if it is to be a movement, must be kaleidoscopically diverse in principle. To be politically effective, it will be a radical coalition — or nothing at all. And although such a coalition is the single conceivable force capable of transforming contemporary society to its roots, it can only take on the systemic source of each of its components' specific struggles by developing a communal vision in which each struggle is joined to every other.

Any movement that would aim at transforming the most basic contemporary oppressions, any such radical coalition, will have to strive for socialism *and* an end to patriarchy *and* an end to racism *and* gay liberation *and* a transformed relationship to nature *and* nuclear disarmament *and* a profound settling of accounts with the once-colonized and native peoples — *without prioritizing one struggle over another*... This post-Marxist universalism must differ from that of Marxism by placing on the agenda the liberation of all oppressed peoples, of the overwhelming majority — *in their specificities* as well as in their commonality. Or it will not happen.

Ronald Aronson, *After Marxism* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995, HX44.5 .A78 1994), p. 36.

³ This strategy parallels that proposed by André Gorz, *Socialism and Revolution* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1973, HX44 .G613), p. 137:

A socialist strategy of progressive reform does not mean that islands of socialism will emerge in the sea of capitalism. But it does mean the building up of working-class and popular power; it means the creation of centers of social management and of direct democracy, particularly in the major industries and co-operatives of production; it means the conquering of positions of strength in representative bodies; it means free products and services fulfilling collective needs; and this must inevitably result in intensified and deepened antagonism between the social production required by the needs and aspirations of the people, on the one hand, and the requirements of capital accumulation and power on the other.

Gorz also describes this strategy in André Gorz, *Strategy for Labor: A Radical Proposal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967, HD8431 .G613). For example, on page 8, he writes:

Seizure of power by insurrection is out of the question, and the waiting game leads the workers' movement to disintegration. The only possible line for the movement is to seize, from the present on, those powers which will prepare it to assume the leadership of society and which will permit it in the meantime to control and to plan the development of the society, and to establish certain

limiting mechanisms which will restrict or dislocate the power of capital.

⁴ See, for example, Bill Moyer's detailed *Movement Action Plan: A Strategic Framework Describing the Eight Stages of Successful Social Movements* (San Francisco: Social Movement Empowerment Project [721 Shrader Street, 94117], 1987).

⁵ See, for example, my paper "Rising Consciousness: Typical Steps People Take in Recognizing the Need to Work for Fundamental Social Change." <<http://www.vernalproject.org>>

⁶ Stewart Burns, *Daybreak of Freedom: The Montgomery Bus Boycott* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997, F334 .M79N39), pp. 1–37, and personal communication with Burns, May 30, 1999.

⁷ Barbara Deming, "On Revolution and Equilibrium," *We Are All Part of One Another: A Barbara Deming Reader*, ed. Jane Meyerding (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1984, PS3554 .E475W38 1984), p. 179. First published in *Liberation Magazine*, February 1968.

⁸ Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994, JC328.3 .A28 1994). Their six case studies offer detailed descriptions of both successful and unsuccessful nonviolent campaigns:

- Nonviolent Efforts in the First Russian Revolution, 1904–1906
- The Ruhrkampf: Regional Defense Against Occupation, 1923
- The Indian Independence Movement, 1930–1931
- Denmark Resistance to Nazi Occupation, 1940–1945
- El Salvador: The Civic Strike of 1944
- Solidarity Versus the Polish Communist Party, 1980–1981