

Chapter Five

Strategy Issues: The Renewable Energy Revolution and World-Changing

I made a conscious decision to change my life in 2004. For 30 years up to that time a top priority as far as what I did with my time and energy was work to build an alternative to the Democratic and Republican parties. But in 2004, I decided to prioritize work on the climate crisis and to try to find a way to make a living while doing so. I did this after the European heat wave in the summer of 2003 that led to 30,000 or more deaths. This catastrophe jolted me into serious study about the issue of global warming, study which led me to conclude that the dangerous, earth-heating-up process was happening much more quickly than I had thought it was.

For many years previous to this, going back to 1975, I had been an active and often leading member of organizations which were either “third parties,” especially the Green Party, or which were trying to build towards one. I believed that the formation and building of a progressive political alternative to the Democratic and Republican parties was strategically necessary if we were ever to transform the United States in positive ways.

To me, this was almost like a motherhood and apple pie belief. I had matured during the 1960’s when Lyndon Johnson, a Democrat, was President, and the Vietnam War had escalated tremendously under his leadership. As I reached the draft age of 18, I studied the history of that war and came to realize that the United States had allied itself with brutally repressive governments in the southern part of Vietnam (“South Vietnam”) for about 20 years. Indeed, without U.S. support those governments would not have been able to exist. And in support of them, the Democratic Party-led government from 1961-1969 was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people in that part of the world.

And then there were the Southern Democrats, leaders in the national Democratic Party, who were not just supporters but active proponents of racist segregation.

As the Vietnam war entered its final years in 1974 and 1975, it didn't take much prodding for me to get involved with an organized effort to form what was being called an organizing committee for a "mass party of people," a people's party. And up until the end of 2004, for virtually all of that time, I was either a paid organizer or an active volunteer for successive progressive groups which were very much independent of and about building a political alternative to Democratic/Republican politics. This included running for office twice, once for City Council in Brooklyn, N.Y. in 1994 on a Unity Party line and once in New Jersey in 2002 as the Green Party's candidate for U.S. Senate.

During the Green Party campaign one of my major issues was global warming. In my campaign literature and in my speeches I talked about the need to get off of Middle East oil—a concrete way to decrease our risk of another Al Qaeda attack—and to shift to renewable energy sources like the wind and the sun. I discovered that this was a very popular set of beliefs; I encountered literally no one who challenged them.

So when the European heat wave of 2003 happened, I was primed to appreciate its significance and responded accordingly. By the end of the year I was reorienting my personal priorities to make more time to work on the climate issue, and by the end of 2004 I had transitioned out of my decade-long job as national coordinator of the Independent Progressive Politics Network so that I could really concentrate on climate work full time.

This is what I have been doing ever since. It has led to my current position, as this is written, of National Campaign Coordinator of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network, a regional organization which works in Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Virginia. This is my major work, although I am a volunteer activist with the New Jersey Green Party and do other independent politics writing and organizing.

2008 was a hopeful year for me and many millions of others. I was encouraged to see the related issues of climate change, energy policy and green jobs emerge as a prime focus of the

Presidential campaign. I was pleased to watch Barack Obama call for the establishment of a government program in which major carbon polluters would need to buy permits to emit greenhouse gases. All of those permits would be auctioned, not given away for free, with the proceeds from the auction being returned to consumers, as well as being used for clean energy and green jobs investments.

Although I voted for Green Party candidate Cynthia McKinney, I was glad Obama won, and I was very encouraged when Henry Waxman defeated the auto industry-friendly John Dingell for the chairmanship of the powerful House Energy and Commerce committee where, I knew, federal climate legislation would be drafted. I was hopeful as that process began in late 2008 and into early 2009.

In late March, however, when Waxman's draft of "The American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009," ACESA, was made public, I found myself being reminded of why I had worked for so long to build a progressive third party. These feelings only deepened over the next three months leading up to the passage in late June of a final piece of ACESA legislation. The version that was passed was even worse than the late-March draft as it was weakened by the coal interests which are so strong within the Democratic Party.

It was similar, if different, with our "yes we can" President. Following up on his 2008 campaign rhetoric, Barack Obama included tens of billions of dollars in revenue from the sale of emissions permits to carbon polluters in his proposed 2010 budget authority resolution in late February of 2009. But when he couldn't get a majority of U.S. Senators to support that part of his budget authority proposal, and after Waxman came out in late March with his ACESA bill draft, Obama went silent. He allowed the powerful fossil fuel interests which continue to dominate Capitol Hill to wreak their carnage.

What might have made a difference? Things might have been different if there had been a much

stronger activist wing of the climate movement visibly demonstrating in support of legislation at the scale of the problem. If there were demonstrations of thousands around the country, or a massive sit-in on Capitol Hill, this might have had an impact. Instead, most environmental and climate groups used their usual tactics, doing some lobbying to try to strengthen ACESA but engaging in virtually no "street heat."

Where were independent progressives during this battle for strong federal climate legislation? They were around, here and there, individuals writing articles, some groups putting out statements, but by and large left-of-center activists who understand that "the system" is our underlying problem were largely missing in action.

Why the Left Has Been Slow to Get it

It has been frustrating, maddening at times, to experience the slowness with which far too many activist-oriented progressives and progressive organizations have moved as far as the urgency of this issue. Indeed, Democratic Party Presidential candidate Barack Obama in 2008 was ahead of many on the political Left in this regard when he made it one of his main issues.

Why the climate blind spot? From my perspective, there are three.

One is the reality that, until about 2007 or so, the issue of the climate crisis was decidedly not a priority issue for mainstream environmental organizations. I discovered this when I decided in late 2003 that I needed to begin working on this issue. When I started looking for a group to work with, I discovered that there were very few in existence which had climate at or near the top of their agenda. It took Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth" movie in 2006 and the rise of the Bill McKibben-led Step It Up movement in 2007 for this to begin to change. Step It Up burst onto the national scene in the spring of that year by organizing 1400 local events in 50 states calling for serious action on the climate crisis.

Why weren't the mainstream enviros making this a priority issue? In part it was related to where

their base was at. They were working on issues that their mainly white middle-class and upper middle class supporters were most interested in, like conservation and traditional pollutants. But when Gore's movie and the rise of a grassroots climate movement via Step It Up led to growing public concern about the climate, many of the enviros changed accordingly, to their credit.

Secondly, for some on the activist Left the relatively limited focus by labor unions on this issue influenced their willingness to make the climate a priority. The United Mineworkers of America had a particularly influential role to play in this regard.

As a union made up primarily of current and former coal miners, and as a union that has lost 2/3rds of its membership over the last 30 years as coal seams have been mined out and the coal industry has become much more capital-intensive, it is not surprising, even if short-sighted, that the UMWA has not supported a movement which is trying to get the USA off of fossil fuels. That lack of support has affected many other unions, some of which have similar concerns as far as job loss during a transition to a clean, renewable energy economy.

Despite this, there are a growing number of unions, many part of a relatively new organization, the Blue Green Alliance, which appreciate the reality of the climate crisis and are speaking up and taking action in support of a just transition off of fossil fuels, a just transition that deliberately and consciously provides job training and new jobs for those currently working in the fossil fuel industry. This development has helped to break down the hesitations of individual labor activists and other activists regarding the importance of the climate crisis.

The third reason for activist Left slowness on this issue is one which is true for many people: a combination of denial and feeling powerless. People are in denial that we are really facing a rapidly unfolding, catastrophic breakdown of human society and the natural environment that has sustained the development of what we call "civilization" for 10,000 years. And when they allow that fact to begin to enter into their consciousness, it tends to overwhelm and paralyze them

unless there is a group taking action which they can join. I've seen and felt this denial/powerlessness phenomenon many times over the nine years that I've been speaking, writing and organizing on this issue.

We are not powerless. History shows that, often, revolutionary movements for fundamental change emerge all of a sudden and bring about change much more quickly than anyone thought possible before the revolution happened. And to get off fossil fuels and onto a serious renewable energy path is for sure a revolutionary change in a world where oil and gas companies are the most powerful industry on the planet.

Change Energy Sources, Change the World

The process of making this urgently-needed renewable energy revolution has great potential to move us towards a very different, much more just, peaceful and egalitarian world, for a number of reasons.

First, everyone is affected by global heating. Some are affected more by it and are suffering and will suffer earlier and more seriously, but this is an issue that ultimately affects us all. People are experiencing the changes in weather patterns in their daily life. Polls show that two-thirds or more of U.S. Americans believe that we need to shift away from the use of fossil fuels.

How does positive, transformative social change happen? There are a number of things that go into the process, but an absolute essential is that a significant majority of people must be in support of that change. As a famous revolutionary leader once said, "the masses make history." Ultimately, building upon the daily sacrifices of a much smaller number of committed organizers, this is true.

On this issue of a renewable energy revolution we have a significant opportunity to build a very broadly-based mass movement. Indeed, it is already happening. When the organization 350.org can organize 2,000 or more local actions all around the country, and over 7,000 all around the

world, on the same day, it cannot be denied that this issue is generating broadly-based movement and action.

Secondly, on a very practical level, renewable energy technology can be used on local levels to provide "power to the people," not just the power of the sun or the wind but power to build local economies that are more self-sufficient. Think about a local neighborhood which joins together to install rooftop solar panels and/or several windmills which, in combination, provide most or all of the electricity needed by that neighborhood. Organizing a neighborhood to do this is, first, a way to bring people together around a commonly-shared need—affordable and reliable electricity. The process of community organizing around a commonly shared need can develop confidence and hope within the community that will then likely manifest itself in other positive projects and initiatives. It will give people a sense of their power when they join together with others.

This kind of a process is the essence of what is needed to build a popular movement capable of making positive social change.

Thirdly, although it is to be expected, even hoped for, that some of today's oil and gas corporations will, over time, respond to our rising movement by becoming energy companies building wind and solar farms and other renewable energy facilities, it is hard to see how they are not going to lose much of their power and a good bit of their wealth. Over a longer period of time, they could well end up being replaced by an energy system much more dispersed and distributed, less centralized and dominated by a tiny handful of powerful CEO's. This will be a good thing, for sure, strengthen the grassroots movement for an end to corporate domination of our political process and for a truly democratic society and government.

Finally, but very importantly, the process of building a clean energy revolution will organically lead growing numbers of people toward a deeply-felt appreciation for and connection to our natural environment. This is something needed not just by the general population but by too many of those who call themselves radicals. It is needed because the negative values of

domination and greed which undergird capitalism and the destructive corporate practices which flow from it are responsible for tremendous environmental damage and pollution. The development of an ecological consciousness and a will to act on it on the part of ever-larger numbers of people is an absolute prerequisite if we are to have any hope for developing the kind of future new society which sees itself as one with nature, not its master.

On an individual level, appreciating, connecting to and learning from the natural world is an essential aspect of how new women and new men can emerge who are able to give leadership within a 21st century revolutionary process.

Strategy for the Climate Movement

Given the absolute necessity for the broadly-based climate movement to succeed soon in its efforts to turn around U.S., and world, energy policy, what are the aspects of a strategy for that movement that hold hope of being successful?

We know based on the experience of late 2006 to late 2010 what is **not** going to do it. It is not going to happen by uncritically supporting Democratic Party leaders in the House, Senate and White House. That is essentially the path taken by many mainstream environmental groups and much of the climate movement from the time the Democrats took over both houses of Congress in the November, 2006 elections through the time that the Democrats had control of the White House and very big majorities in both houses of Congress for two years following the November, 2008 elections. The best that they could do even with those numbers was to narrowly pass a problematic and weak, coal-industry influenced bill in the House of Representatives in June of 2009. Efforts in the Senate led nowhere; there was not even a willingness to bring a climate bill onto the floor of the Senate for a public debate on this most fundamental of issues.

And President Obama for the remainder of his 2008-2012 presidency almost never uttered the words “climate change” again. On an international level he and his representatives acted to

weaken the world's efforts to move together on this urgent crisis. At the big December, 2009 Copenhagen climate conference, Obama personally led the ramming through of a "Copenhagen agreement" whereby each country would decide on its own how much it was willing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Those agreements would be cobbled together and called an international agreement, with nothing, absolutely nothing to enforce these woefully-not-enough national commitments.

What the Obama Administration has done on an international level on the climate crisis is truly shameful. "Criminal" is too strong a word for some progressives but given what we're facing absent serious action on climate, it's probably a more accurate description.

Why this woeful track record? Clearly, it's the power of the coal, oil and natural gas companies and those other powerful corporate interests, like the railroads and the auto industry, allied with them. The fossil fuel industry is overwhelmingly dominant when it comes to the Republican Party and, as far as the Democratic Party, has significant influence. That is why Obama, during his 2012 reelection campaign, ran on the 2008 Republican Party slogan of "all of the above" when it comes to energy. He is boasting of the increase in the amount of oil and gas being extracted from U.S. soil and talking about natural gas as if it was a clean and renewable energy source, which it definitely is not.

No, the climate movement needs to be about a very different approach, one very consciously independent in its decision-making of the influence of either Republicans or Democrats, while always being about working to build political pressure on elected officials to do the right thing legislatively.

I see four primary strategic tasks for the national climate movement: widespread grassroots organizing; popular mobilization and civil disobedience; support for wind, solar and other renewables, non-carbon and lower-carbon transportation, and energy efficiency; and continual pressure on the federal government to get legislation passed which puts a steadily increasing price on the bringing of coal, oil and natural gas into the economy.

Grassroots Organizing: We need the involvement or support of tens of millions of people to overcome the power of the fossil fuel industry. We need grassroots organizing on climate in communities, at workplaces, in churches, synagogues and mosques, on college campuses and elsewhere. Without forms of organization through which local people can become involved, learn more about the issues and grow in their ability to give leadership themselves to others, we won't have the numbers or the staying power to ultimately win.

Over the past 5-7 years there has been a mushrooming of local organizations focused either exclusively or primarily on the climate crisis. This includes groups like the one I work for, the Chesapeake Climate Action Network, which since 2002 has been doing this work, as well as local chapters of established green groups like the Sierra Club. It includes affiliates of the U.S. Climate Action Network and community organizations fighting mountaintop removal, planned coal plants, natural gas fracking, export terminals for coal and gas, gas pipelines or other fossil fuel industry infrastructure. It includes more radical groups like Rising Tide, campus groups related to the Energy Action Coalition or groups which are connected with the international group 350.org. My educated guess is that there are a minimum of several thousand such groups in the USA, and over the last couple of years, since the failure of efforts to pass cap-and-trade legislation in Congress, there is an increase in the amount of collaborative work being done by most of these groups on various "fronts of struggle" as far as climate.

From my experience there's a fairly high level of organizing skills within this loosely-connected network, and, to its credit, a good deal of on-going leadership training that takes place. While there is a recognition of the urgency of the climate crisis, there is also an understanding that the shift away from fossil fuels will take years and that we need to develop people's willingness to stay active for years accordingly.

Strong local movements and organizations are essential not just to organize and mobilize the political pressure needed for the United States to give the leadership the world desperately needs

from us. It is also necessary to prepare, to move towards, a new renewable energy economy which shifts power, both electrical power and people power, away from centralized energy corporations and an often-unresponsive federal government to local levels.

As Ross Gelbspan has written, “The coming changes clearly suggest that, to the extent possible, we should be eating locally and regionally grown food. We should be preparing to take our energy from a decentralized system using whichever non-carbon energy technologies are best suited to their natural surroundings—solar in sunny areas, offshore wave and tidal power in coastal areas, wind farms in the world’s wind corridors, and geothermal almost everywhere.”

Gelbspan also appreciates the importance of this local work “during an era of profound natural upheaval. The key to our survival lies in an enhanced sense of community. If we maintain the fiction that we can thrive as isolated individuals, we will find ourselves at the same emotional dead end as the current crop of survivalists: an existence marked by defensiveness, mistrust, suspicion and fear.” (1)

Popular Mobilization and Nonviolent Direct Action: Think of the great social movements of the last hundred years. Whether it be the women’s movement of the first part of the century and then the last third of it, the labor movement of the 1930’s and 1940’s, the civil rights movement of the 50’s and 60’s, the peace movement to stop the Vietnam war of the 60’s and early 70’s, the lesbian and gay rights movement of the 80’s and 90’s or the movement of the first decade of this century to end the Iraq war—all of them, some to a greater degree, placed a priority on the organization of mass demonstrations bringing out hundreds of thousands of people, combined with nonviolent direct action.

For the climate movement of this first decade of the 21st century, the largest number of people at any one demonstration in the United States as this is being written has been about 10,000. This happened on November 6, 2011 in what turned out to be the culminating action in a successful three month campaign to get Barack Obama to put a halt to plans to approve the Keystone XL

pipeline from the tar sands of Alberta, Canada to the gulf coast of Texas. But a major reason why there have not been bigger demonstrations is because the activist wing of the climate movement has pioneered a new form of “distributed” actions, local actions in hundreds or thousands of communities on the same date, linked together by the internet and a sophisticated and user-friendly web site. 350.org, in particular, a loose network held together by Bill McKibben and former students at Middlebury College, has been instrumental in the development of this tactic. 150,000 people or more have taken action together in the United States on the same day on some of these days of action.

Nonviolent civil disobedience is a form of action particularly appropriate for this issue. This tactic is a way to underline the urgency of a situation. When people are willing to put themselves at risk of arrest, police violence, serious injury or time in prison, and when they do so in a nonviolent way so that the message being sent does not get confused, it can often have an impact on those who hear about it.

People generally will take an issue more seriously if they either see large numbers of people demonstrating or people willing to put their bodies on the line. Usually it is best to have a combination of the two, either by having large numbers of people present in support of a smaller group of those risking arrest or by having thousands of people feeling so strongly about an issue that they are willing to take part in a well-organized mass action of civil disobedience.

The “Beyond Coal” movement did just this via a mass civil disobedience action that took place on March 2nd, 2009 in Washington, D.C. On that date thousands of people took part in a demonstration on a work day, Monday, against a 100 year old coal-fired plant on Capitol Hill that provided some of the power to Congressional buildings. A key component of this action was the involvement of a sizeable delegation of people from Appalachia where coal has been king for a long time.

This was a day whose high temperature was in the 20’s and on which about half a foot of snow

was on the ground, but that didn't prevent people's spirited participation in an all-afternoon blockade of all of the entrances to the plant. Nothing went in, and nothing came out. And because of the action's breadth of involvement and unwavering commitment to nonviolent civil disobedience to press our demands, the Congressional leadership announced just before the action that they were moving to eliminate the use of coal as an energy source for the plant and to shift to still-polluting but, as seen by some, "cleaner" natural gas. (It is "cleaner" when burned compared to coal or oil, but natural gas produced by hydraulic fracturing—fracking—is a very water- and air-polluting process for those close to fracking wells; in addition, there is significant leakage of methane, a greenhouse gas about 100 times more powerful than CO₂ over the first 20 years after being released into the atmosphere, such that many who have studied it believe it may be as bad or worse than coal, emissions-wise.)

Two and a half years later a more powerful and effective civil disobedience campaign took place, led by Bill McKibben. For two weeks, day after day, scores, sometimes hundreds, of people sat down in front of the White House and were arrested, 1,253 in all. By the beginning of the second week, major news media began to carry stories of this unprecedented action, and two months later, after the November 6th demonstration of 10,000 at the White House, this campaign won a victory.

Without question, this is a tactic that must and will continue to grow as the climate crisis deepens, extreme weather events become much more frequent and the climate movement grows stronger and bigger.

Support for renewables and efficiency: But it is not enough for the climate movement to take action against proposed new or existing coal plants, export terminals, pipelines or fracking well sites. We must also be actively supportive of wind, solar, geothermal and other genuinely clean and renewable energy sources, such as waves and currents. Wind and solar, without question, are rapidly growing throughout the world as primary sources of non-fossil fuel and genuinely clean energy.

What would this mean? One example is in Maryland where my group, the Chesapeake Climate Action Network, has been working since 2010 to help jump-start an offshore wind industry in both Maryland and up and down the east coast where wind is a tremendous potential energy source because of the relatively shallow Outer Continental Shelf. Estimates are that there is enough wind to provide all of the electrical power needs—CHECK—of the Atlantic coast states.

In 2011 and again in 2012 CCAN worked with many state legislators, the governor, religious, student, labor and other groups to pass legislation in Annapolis, the state capital, that would incentivize the production of a jobs-creating offshore wind industry. But each year, the power of the fossil fuel industry, doing their work behind closed doors with key legislators in the State Senate, prevented the passage of this modest, let's-get-things-started bill. As this is written, we hope that we will succeed in 2013.

In California, Oregon, Washington, New Jersey and elsewhere, environmental and climate groups have successfully advocated for state policies that have helped homeowners, governments and businesses cover some of the costs of installing photovoltaic solar panels on roofs. On a federal level they have supported tax credits for renewable energy that have helped to advance the wind and solar industries in particular.

When it comes to transportation, we must continue to advocate for a dramatic expansion of mass public transportation via buses and trains, for expanded biking and walking infrastructure and for federal and state policies which increase fuel efficiency for cars and trucks. We need to move as rapidly as possible toward electric cars and the infrastructure to support them.

Within cities and towns, programs to dramatically advance the weatherization, insulation and “greening” of buildings are a win-win-win for the climate, for the unemployed and for people’s bank accounts. There are millions of jobs and small businesses that can be created or grow doing this essential work, if climate and other groups and progressive elected officials publicly and actively support and champion it.

Activist groups fighting against dirty, polluting energy must also be known as leading champions of the clean energy sources good for people's lungs, their bodies, their children and the planet.

Federal Legislation: Finally, it is absolutely essential that we obtain federal legislation, and a federal government that is no longer under the thumb of the fossil fuel industry, so that we the people can put a price on the extraction or importation of fossil fuels, a steadily more expensive price, that accordingly drives a rapid shift to renewables, conservation and efficiency.

There are three different approaches that environmental and climate groups have supported toward this end.

One approach, which was embodied in the American Clean Energy and Security Act (ACESA) that passed in the House of Representatives in late June of 2009, goes by the name of “cap and trade.”

Under “cap and trade,” key parts of which are central to the Kyoto Protocol (the international climate treaty), greenhouse gas (ghg) polluting companies need to buy pollution permits each year from the government, one permit for each ton of ghg's emitted. An overall cap is set on how much pollution is allowed each year, and the cap keeps coming down. Permits are either auctioned off or are given free to carbon polluters. Once companies get those permits, they have four basic options:

- 1) They can cut back on their ghg emissions so that they don't need any more permits for that particular year, and they can keep doing this year after year, buying or receiving free permits as the overall cap keeps getting reduced.

- 2) They can use “offsets” to replace the reductions in pollution required by the cap. An “offset” is an investment of money—almost always less money than would need to be invested in actual emissions reductions at the source of them—in a supposed clean energy or energy efficiency project somewhere else in the world that, also supposedly, is reducing ghg emissions. The

problem is that studies have shown that as many as 2/3rds of these offset projects either would have happened anyway, or they don't do what they say they will do as far as reducing emissions. And they are very difficult to verify.

3) They can cut their ghg emissions deeper than they are required to. Then they can sell on a "carbon market"—think Wall Street or commodities futures markets—the excess permits they have been given free or bought at auction. They sell them to another company which went over its allotted quota of ghg pollution or an investor or speculator who is trying to make money via this "carbon market."

4) They can go over their cap but spend money on the carbon market buying additional permits so they are in compliance.

There are lots of problems with this system, some of which are alluded to above. One is when permits are given away for free. Why should companies which have been polluting our air and water for decades be given free permits to keep doing the same thing? They shouldn't, but the political science of the House of Representatives led to fully 85% of all of the permits in the ACESA bill passed at the end of June, 2009 being given away free for a period of 15-20 years, most of them to these historic polluters.

Another major problem is the offsets. There is no way that all of them can be verified as actually doing what they claim to be doing as far as ghg reductions, first of all. Some of the offsets involve negative social and environmental costs, as in the tearing down of forests in Indonesia so that big corporations can plant palm plantations for development of palm oil to be used as a bio-fuel. Given the destruction of the carbon-sequestering forests, this has been shown to be a net negative for decades as far as ghg reduction. In addition, this forest destruction displaces the homes and livelihoods of Indigenous peoples.

Offsets let companies off the hook from making actual reductions in their fossil fuel use;

analyses have shown that if the ACESA bill would have been passed and enacted into law and all of the allowed offsets in it were used, there could well have been little or no actual reductions of emissions at the points of pollution—coal plants, oil refineries, etc.-- by U.S. companies until the mid-twenties.

The final major problem with offsets is that it is a system prone to gaming, profit-taking and speculation by unscrupulous investment companies and bankers, because the carbon market is open to anybody to take part in it. Complex financial instruments similar to the derivatives, mortgage-backed securities and credit default swaps which almost destroyed the U.S. economy in the first decade of the 21st century will almost certainly emerge if this carbon market would take shape, not something to be desired.

Fortunately, there are many hundreds of local, state, regional and national climate, environmental, consumer, social justice and other groups which do not support “cap and trade.” They support either what is called a “cap and dividend” system or a “carbon tax/fee and dividend” system.

Under both systems a price is put on the emitting of greenhouse gas emissions, or just on carbon dioxide, the major greenhouse gas. Under a carbon tax it's just that, a tax, or a fee, one which goes progressively higher over time to make sure that, in the process, there is less and less burning of coal, oil and natural gas. Under the cap and dividend systems that have been introduced in Congress, a steadily-declining cap is enacted, 100% of the permits to emit carbon are auctioned to polluters and there are no offsets allowed.

The “dividend” part of the equation—also called “cash back”--refers to the return to the American people of all or most of the money raised, divided up equally, via a regular check or wire transfer to a person's bank account. The prices of electricity, gasoline, heating oil, natural gas or anything with carbon in it would go up because of the tax/fee or auction of permits during a transition period as we shift from carbon fuels to renewables and efficiency. But studies have

shown that the dividend or “cash back” would make up for or be higher than those additional costs for a large majority of U.S. Americans. And for everyone, those higher prices on items that include fossil fuels would encourage individual and family decisions to “go green” as far as appliances, lightbulbs, home insulation, shifting to renewable sources, cars (or use of alternatives to them), etc. to save money.

There has been growing support in the US for one or the other of these approaches since the failure of the cap and trade, ACESA approach. We must keep hammering away, keep articulating and building support for this absolutely needed federal action, as soon as possible.

Climate Change and Social Change

The experiences of late 2006 through the end of 2010 were hard lessons for many environmental and climate activists about the limitations of a follow-the-Democrats strategy when it comes to climate action. It turns out that even an existential threat to human civilization, the very real possibility of a catastrophic future not far off but very soon, was not enough to overcome the power of the fossil fuel industry within both major political parties.

This is why, at the same time that we build a movement that is explicitly and primarily focused on rapidly getting off fossil fuels and onto a renewable energy path, we need to also build an independent political movement that is about not just the climate crises but also the many other crises facing us today. We need to build an alternative to the Democrats and Republicans. We need a political force that is based in and accountable to the people, not fossil fuel and other corporate interests.

Am I saying we need a new political party, a “third party.” No, I am not, even though for over 35 years I have been a member and sometimes a leader of efforts to create such a thing. Indeed, it is my experiences more-or-less hitting my head against the wall trying to help open up our corporate-dominated, two-party-only system to other voices that has led me to believe and to publicly advocate since about 2010 that what we need is a **“third force,”** not (just) a third party.

What we need is an alliance which consciously brings together progressive Democrats—including some in office or running for it—Green Party members, other independents, people who see themselves as revolutionaries and those who are reformers, and open-minded grassroots Republicans. More than that, this alliance eventually needs to support and work to elect candidates running both as Democrats and progressive independents, and maybe even an occasional Republican.

This is one major difference with the issue-oriented and focused climate movement, which is not going to be running candidates for office.

To sharpen the point even more: I am completely convinced after over 35 years of being active in organizations trying to build a mass, progressive third party in the USA, such an approach will never, ever get us to the promised land. The huge, historically-based, structural obstacles in the way of the formation of a truly mass-based (tens of millions), new political party make it essential that a different approach be used. Those obstacles include: the corrupting influence of the huge amounts of money needed when running for many local, state and definitely national elected offices; the role of the corporate-owned mass media in almost-always excluding serious coverage of other-than-Democrat/Republican candidates; a 19th century system of voting, winner-take-all, rather than proportional representation in the winning of seats in government; and discriminatory ballot access laws in many states to make it difficult for independent candidates and parties to get on or stay on the ballot.

These are the main ways that the 1%--or, really, the 1/10th of the 1%--have maintained their power and undercut issue-oriented mass movements demanding substantive and transformative reforms. Sooner or later, those movements, whether for peace and cuts in the military budget, single-payer health care (once supported by over 100 members of the House of Representatives), mortgage foreclosure relief, climate action, immigrant rights reform or something else, have no choice but to attempt to get federal legislation passed. And when this happens, as we saw with ACESA, we are decidedly on the enemy's territory where they have 5 lobbyists CHECK for every member of Congress, in addition to everything else at their disposal.

As long as the debate over what to do in Congress is between Republicans overwhelmingly doing the direct bidding of major corporate interests and Democrats unwilling to stand up and fight openly against those interests on a consistent basis, we have little chance of achieving our climate, peace, justice, health care, immigrant rights, equality, economic or other objectives.

A third force would, almost certainly, mainly support progressive Democrats at first as far as its electoral tactics, but it would also welcome the involvement of Greens and others who support or run as independents for office. Decisions as to who to support and how would be made democratically. Perhaps more importantly, a third force would be supportive of the kinds of electoral reforms that would open up our corporate- and two-party dominated, undemocratic electoral system and make it possible for many more voices and viewpoints to be heard. Such reforms must include public--not corporate--financing of elections, instant runoff voting, proportional representation, reasonable—not restrictive—ballot access laws, free media time for all candidates who show a base of support, etc.

But we will only get the federal legislation we need when we are able to combine the “inside” work of progressives standing up in support of strong people’s legislation with an “outside” mass movement that is visible, demonstrative, determined, creative and edgy, changing the political dynamics accordingly.

We saw a good example of what this kind of outside mass movement can do with the fall, 2011 upsurge all over the country of people-led occupations of Wall Street and other locations of the 1%. For several months that inspiring, youth-led, people’s movement held firm, and U.S. politics changed rapidly as a result. The dominant national issue went from being government debt to inequality and injustice. Those issues continue to resonate a year later, even after that movement was temporarily set back by government infiltration, police harassment and mass media playing up of internal differences and weaknesses, all of which made it possible for most outdoor occupations to be shut down by December of 2011.

Is it realistic to believe that progressive Democrats, including elected officials, will be willing to work within a broad united force, a third force, with Green Party members and other

independents who are deeply critical of the Democratic Party? I think it is, and one of the reasons I think so is because of the experiences from 1984 to 1988 of the National Rainbow Coalition.

A “third force” strategy was first articulated that I know of by Rev. Jesse Jackson in 1984 during his first presidential campaign. He tied it to the building of the National Rainbow Coalition as a coalition bringing together African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asians, farmers, workers, feminists, lesbians and gays, peace activists, environmentalists and others disenfranchised or disturbed by the system. It also openly welcomed those who were committed to building a third party, although as Rev. Jackson became more politically powerful during his 1988 Presidential campaign, those who supported that objective began to be marginalized. Then, in 1989, the incredible potential of this popular alliance was essentially destroyed when organizational changes were forced through from the top that took away the Rainbow Coalition’s dynamic and movement-building character.

That tragic ending of this promising movement doesn’t negate the soundness of the third force strategy, or the continuing need for it. We should learn from this experience and do all we can to ensure that the internal processes used by a still-to-be-born third force would be participatory and democratic. There is no question in my mind that this type of process is practiced and appreciated by many independent progressive activists today, the people who are essential if a third force is to be developed. One of the reasons I believe this is because of the existence of the U.S. Social Forum movement.

The Social Forum Movement: Since 2001 there have been a series of international gatherings, sometimes involving over 150,000 people, organized under the framework of the World Social Forum (WSF). The impetus for the WSF emerged originally out of the political and electoral successes of the Brazilian Worker’s Party. The first WSF was convened in Sao Paulo, Brazil as a counter-meeting to world capitalism’s World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. 12,000 attended that first WSF in 2001; by the next year the number had grown to 60,000.

Since that time, almost every year up until the last couple of years, there have been a series of

WSF's and, emerging out of that process, regional Social Forums in Europe, South America, Africa, South Asia, South Africa and the United States. There have also been a number of local Social Forums.

The Social Forum movement is a progressive, multi-tendency, diverse thing. More than anything else it is political space for people who are active on a wide range of issues to come together periodically to talk with one another, both with people working on the same issue and with people working on other issues and from other countries, cultures and backgrounds. A strength of the movement is its diversity.

An example of its importance is that it was through the WSF network that a call was issued in early 2003 for coordinated actions on February 15th of that year against the U.S. and Britain's plans for a military invasion of Iraq. On that day 10-15 million people demonstrated all over the world.

In the United States there have been two US Social Forums organized, in June of 2007 in Atlanta, Ga. and in Detroit, Mi. in June, 2010. 12,000 came together in Atlanta and 20,000 in Detroit for five days of meetings, dancing, singing, listening, planning, marching and inspiration. It was described as a "beautiful coming together" by one of its planners, Ruben Solis. It was a classic example of how empowering it is to have an open and inclusive process and structure. Any organization which registered was able to organize workshops on subjects of its choosing as long as the subjects were politically consistent with the USSF's broad principles. What this meant was that on the three full days where workshops were held, people could choose between 100 different options each workshop session, 900 in all.

The daily culture of the USSF—the way in which we interacted with one another—was deep and profound. During the Atlanta event, despite the heat and humidity of a deep South summer, logistical challenges like long waits for overloaded elevators, and the inevitable glitches and problems, the dominant spirit all throughout was collaborative, comradely and cooperative. It

was truly beautiful rubbing shoulders, sitting next to, talking with, dancing with, feeling love and solidarity with thousands of sister and brother activists of so many cultures and nationalities.

Who Would Make Up the Alliance? We must build a stronger, justice-oriented, independent progressive movement at the same time as we build a stronger climate movement. And we must be clear that both interrelated processes involve conscious alliance-building work across lines of culture, color, nationality, gender, age, identity and other differences. We must build a broadly-based popular alliance.

It is essential that we get this. Those transnational corporations who rule over us have tremendous power, and we can't forget that five of the top ten richest corporations in the world are oil companies. Corporations own and run the TV networks, almost all national radio networks and most of the mass media. Although these media institutions are not monolithic—there is a difference between NPR and Fox News—their dominant role, particularly when it comes to TV, is to propagate a view of the world which is often escapist, at worst disempowering and alienating. These huge businesses control much of the U.S. Congress and heavily influence whomever is in the White House. They work closely with the Pentagon. Their leaders are on the boards of major universities.

We won't overcome their power and build a much more just, much more democratic, much more healthy society unless tens of millions of people are with us.

What are the constituencies whose involvement is critical to the success of this popular alliance third force?

Obviously the **environmental and climate** movements will be a central part of it.

Young people, whose future is very much in doubt in a world of potentially catastrophic climate change on top of institutional injustice, war and preparations for it, must be present in significant numbers in an alliance movement. And many young people are in motion and active, around a number of issues but in particular around climate/green issues.

People of color, black, brown, red and yellow, are an absolutely essential component, including in the alliance leadership. Down through history, when African American people, in particular, have gotten into political motion on a mass scale, the results have been historic. Agitation and direct action against slavery in the first half of the 19th century led to the Civil War and the legal end of chattel slavery. Reconstruction governments in the South after the Civil War, in which newly-elected blacks led successful efforts to enact reforms that benefited not just newly-freed slaves but poor whites as well, were the precursor to the mass, multi-racial populist movement of the late 1800's. The black nationalist Marcus Garvey movement of the 1920's impacted upon the multi-racial, CIO-led, mass labor upsurge of the 30's. The civil rights movements of the 50's and 60's had direct and indirect connections to the emergence of a whole variety of movements following and interrelating with it. And finally, the black-led Rainbow Coalition movement of the 80's helped to generate the political energy for the development of several major national third party groups in the 90's, the Green Party, the Labor Party and the New Party.

Organized working people, whether through workplace-based unions or in community-based organizations, are another key component of the alliance. They have much to gain from a transition to a jobs-creating and community-building renewable energy revolution, and they have much to gain from fundamental social change that leads to a more just and fair sharing of the resources of society. And the emergence and development of a popular alliance can play a leavening role within the ranks of organized labor, strengthening the more democratic and activist unions and encouraging the growth of that kind of unionism more broadly within society.

The **women's movement** that has emerged over the last 40 years and impacted society in myriad ways is clearly a key constituency. In addition to the issues that are specific to women—equal pay for work of comparable worth, reproductive rights, campaigns against rape and wife abuse, proportional representation in leadership, others—women bring to a larger progressive movement crucial insights about process. They can help develop a way of working that is more cooperative, that connects stated objectives to a way of working and relating to one another

which lives up to those objectives. This is essential if we are to ever build a permanent alliance capable of contesting for political power and transforming society.

There are other sectors of society which must be “at the table:”

-**Family farmers**, who have become a very small percentage of the U.S. population but whose knowledge and experiences will become increasingly important as climate change makes the growing of food more difficult. It is virtually certain that growing numbers of people will need to take up farming as part of a coping strategy as stronger droughts, floods and storms become the norm.

-**Seniors** are numerically one of the largest groups within U.S. society. Their insights and wisdom can help an alliance avoid mistakes, and their specific issues—health care, social security, pension rights, others—are by no means settled.

-The **gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender movement** is one of the most recent of the new social movements to emerge over the past half-century, although semi-underground gay and lesbian groups go back much further. This movement demands that heterosexual people open their minds and their emotions to people with a different sexual orientation and provide for full equality and human rights, including marriage equality.

-**People with disabilities** have developed organizations and taken actions demanding laws and practices which allow them to be included within the workings of society. Tens of millions of people have some kind of disability and every day, unfortunately, more people lose limbs or are injured on the job or in some other way. A more humane and just society will take these issues seriously.

-Progressive-minded **people of faith** have been politically active for decades in various peace and justice efforts. The African American church was a critical component of the civil rights

movement, and the involvement of prominent Catholic priests in the movement against the Vietnam War played an important role in broadening out the base and power of that movement, and on many other issues ever since. People of faith also bring valuable insights from their spiritual traditions of importance to all members of a popular alliance.

-Owners of small businesses often have a difficult time making ends meet economically. A third force must be supportive of them, encourage people to patronize locally-owned businesses rather than the big national corporate chains wherever possible. We are not against “business” but against corporate monopolies and big businesses that disrespect workers and the environment and utilize profits to unfairly stack the deck in their favor as far as government policy.

An Activist and Electoral Third Force: It is encouraging that there are a growing number of calls for and some organized efforts toward what could become a new third force. We need this badly. The primary reason why legislation that is being produced on Capitol Hill is so weak and problematic has to do with the inherently undemocratic nature of a two-parties-only political system. Such a system muffles the voices of those tens of millions of people who have political views that are more progressive than those of the big money-dependent, corporate-influenced, national Democratic Party. This system weakens progressive organizations and the overall progressive movement because we are given the choice of either backing Democratic Party candidates and processes that are in no way consistently progressive, supporting third party candidates and parties who face immense obstacles in their efforts to win and grow, or just not voting. These are not good choices, and this is why many activists consciously put their energies into the building of extra-electoral movements and organizations.

As someone who has been deeply involved in efforts to form a progressive third party since 1975, who was active in the Rainbow movement of the 80's and has been part of the U.S. Social Forum process since before the 2007 Atlanta forum, I continue to believe that a key part of a strategy for fundamental social and economic transformation in the U.S. is the development of a

strong, mass-based political alternative to the Democrats and Republicans. However, hard experience has shown that it's not going to happen solely by establishing a third party organization and/or running third party candidates, as important as both those things are. We need a broad, independent and progressive, united front, a progressive third force with an electoral and an activist strategy.

As long as we are dependent upon the Democratic Party to advance a legislative agenda, as long as there is no broadly-based independent political force able to bring another credible voice to the table backed up by millions of dedicated supporters doing effective grassroots organizing and visible, demonstrative action, necessary legislation will continue to be watered-down or defeated by the corporate bad guys.

What are some of the tactics and organizing approaches, both new and old, that we must use if we are to bring about change we can believe in because it will be change that millions of us participate in making happen?

FOOTNOTES

- 1) Ross Gelbspan, "Beyond the Point of No Return," at www.heatisonline.com.