

Chapter Six

Tactics to Get to a New Society

It's not enough to have an overall strategy, a "grand plan" to get to a just, democratic and life-sustaining society, as I have tried to put forward in proceeding chapters. Before you can build a house you need an architectural plan. Once you have that plan, you need all the workers engaging in a whole variety of tasks—laying the foundation, carpentry, masonry, roofing, electrical work, windows installation, etc.--that eventually yields a house.

When it comes to the social, political, cultural and economic transformation of society, it is similar. There are a whole series of different kinds of work that are needed if we are to reach our goal.

What are those essential pieces, those tactics, without which we have little chance of success? Based on my experience, I would say there are seven:

- a "we," not "I," method of interaction with others;
- anti-oppression/nonviolent conflict resolution consciousness and methodology;
- coalition-building, working well with potential allies;
- popular education in the context of work on issues
- effective mass mobilization/strategic uses of nonviolent civil disobedience;
- strategic use of all kinds of media;
- strategic involvement with the electoral process and elected officials

All of these tactics, of course, must be used in the context of building organization. Unless people join together, work together in a positive and constructive way, nothing will change. And as I outlined in chapter four, we need to build internally democratic organizations that reflect the new culture we are creating and working toward for the society as a whole.

From those essential "bases of operation," informed by our strategic perspectives, we go about our work to inform, inspire, motivate and enlist others in our movement.

"We," Not "I"

All of us presently active in the movement brought cultural baggage into this work. If we came from upper-class or upper-middle-class backgrounds the odds are good that we came into it thinking that we were better able to give leadership than those not from that background, or very willing to engage aggressively in competition with others over who should be in leadership. It was similar if we were white or male, and particularly if we were white, male and upper-class.

If we came from a disadvantaged background, as a person of color, from a low-income family and/or as a woman, the likelihood is that it was harder for us to assert leadership, or if we did,

hard to do it without a sharp edge of sometimes-problematic anger, especially toward those from more privileged backgrounds.

If we are going to be successful in our work of transforming society, however, we need to confront our past and move beyond it, become people able to work in a cooperative and comradely way with others. We need to get past being inordinately concerned about “I” and become much more concerned, naturally, organically, with “we.”

This does not mean that we are not daily taking care of and loving our own selves, nourishing ourselves as best as possible. But we do this for a purpose, so that we are better able to make connections with others to help them.

Applied to organizing for social change, what this means is that we have to be prepared, have to welcome even, taking a back seat so that other people can step forward to speak up, be recognized, give leadership in situations where these things are called for. Our organizing work has to be about working with others in such a way that they grow from being new members of a group to the point where they are able not just to do these things but feel comfortable doing them. Over time, they also need to become “leadership trainers,” bringing others along just as they were.

Antonio Gramsci, a brilliant Italian socialist leader jailed for many years in the 1930’s for his opposition to fascism, wrote about how our “mode of existence can no longer consist of eloquence, the external and momentary arousing of sentiments and passions, but must consist of being actively involved in practical life, as a builder, an organizer, ‘permanently persuasive’ because he is not merely an orator.” (1)

Builders and organizers function differently than eloquent speakers. Of necessity, they must be more humble, more collective in their way of working with others, consciously encouraging them to grow and learn. To build, they must have a vision of what it is they wish to construct, and this needs to be communicated to others to motivate them. This is not the same thing as getting up on the stage and speaking, the “momentary arousing of sentiments and passions.”

“We,” not “I.” Organizations committed in an all-sided way to democratic process. The process of developing consciousness integrated into the day-to-day work of individual organizers and the group. This is fundamental, essential to forward progress toward our objectives.

Anti-Oppression and Nonviolent Conflict Resolution

What do I mean by “anti-oppression?” What do I mean by “nonviolent conflict resolution?” And why do I put them together?

Anti-oppression means a willingness to educate about and take action on racism, classism, sexism, ableism, anti-Semitism, ageism and heterosexism. These isms, these destructive attitudes and practices directed at people because of who they are, frustrate and impede the development

of a unified movement and they frustrate and impede the eventual emergence of a just, democratic and life-affirming society.

It is wrong to discriminate or oppress people because their skin color is different, they come from a low-income or working-class background, they are a woman, they have a disability, they are Jewish or Arab, they are young or old, or they are lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transgender. And it is right for all of these people to be welcomed into participation in the climate movement, the broader progressive movement, and any and all organizations working for positive social change.

More than that, it is essential that we create, as best as possible, a positive cultural environment within which people who have one or more of these characteristics feel supported, including if and when they feel the need to question or challenge statements or actions that they consider discriminatory or insensitive. Other people who are not on the receiving end of that insensitivity need to step forward and speak up in support, be good allies, help both those experiencing pain and those inflicting it, oftentimes unintentionally or unconsciously.

There is a great deal of cultural baggage that we all carry around within us just by living in the world as it is. This is especially true for those of us living within the United States, the most powerful empire the world has ever known, with one of the largest, most virulent and ignorant right-wing operations of any country in the world. All of us need to take the time to understand how the negative things learned via the schools, the television, the two-party system, the mass media, all of it, have impacted and can continue to impact us if we don't consciously reject them.

The work of challenging oppressive statements and actions takes place both within our organizations and movements and via our public actions. In many ways the public actions—challenging racist institutions, supporting good policies, etc.—are easier. It is the internal work that is harder, but it is absolutely essential work. We're not going to accumulate the numbers and the political strength we need if we're overwhelmingly white, male, straight, middle-class and middle-aged.

I have often been in situations where someone in a meeting, usually unconsciously, says something which is racist, sexist or in some way disrespectful. It is not easy to raise your hand, get called upon and then address what the person said, but it is necessary. I have found that one of the things which helps me to do so is to think about personal friends who are people of color or women or who have the characteristics being disrespected. When I do that, when I think about how they would feel if they were present, it pushes me, in a positive way, to have the courage, as gently but straight-forwardedly as possible, to confront the problematic statement.

It is essential that we deal directly, in as comradely a way as possible, with racist, sexist, heterosexist, ageist or other negative comments or actions when they happen. We must use our anti-oppression and nonviolent conflict resolution skills. This is easier said than done, but unless it is done, our coalitions are not going to be what they can be or function as they should.

More than this, we must recognize and deal with the more subtle ways that these negative ideologies manifest themselves. For example, in a multi-racial but predominantly white setting, white people sometimes do not truly listen when people of color make contributions in the course of a discussion. It's as if the people of color were there to "integrate" the group but not to be listened to or taken seriously.

Related to this is the problem of paternalism. Paternalism involves white people relating to people of color in a condescending, "nice" and "concerned" but ultimately unequal and disrespectful way, not expressing their opinions or feelings but instead trying to keep relations "civil" through not sharing disagreements or opposition.

The same thing can happen as far as men in relationship to women, older people in relationship to young people, etc.

Nonviolent conflict resolution is a way to work at and resolve disagreements and issues among people, groups, nations, etc., and that is why I have connected it with the anti-oppression work that must be done.

There are hundreds or thousands of people, perhaps more, who see themselves as nonviolence trainers. Part of what they do is teach people about techniques for resolving conflicts and differences in a way which, as much as possible, is a "win-win" for both parties.

I am not a "nonviolence trainer," have not taken extensive courses or been in conferences toward that end, but I know many people who are, and I have been on the receiving end of presentations and workshops. What I have learned from those interactions over the years is that if we are to have a chance of addressing conflicts in a way which is positive, we must learn to become active listeners.

Listening, really deep listening, is not something we are born with. It is a skill, something that is learned through social interaction with others, through trial and error as far as human interaction, and through a conscious effort to strengthen this aspect of each of our personalities.

Deep listening involves more than just hearing the words that another person says. It involves hearing, picking up on, the feelings behind the words, or even the experiences behind the words. It is about absorbing all of it, putting 100% of one's mental and emotional energy into the listening process.

Too often we don't do this. In a discussion we're more looking for an opportunity to "put in our two cents," or worse, forcing the discussion to go the way we want it to go. This is not a productive way to build connections and understanding between people.

Active, deep listening allows the person doing it to identify more fully with the one being listened to. It allows her or him to respond in a way and with words that are helpful and

clarifying, or with questions that demonstrate genuine interest and concern. This is a huge step toward resolution of conflicts.

Nonviolent conflict resolution can happen when one of the parties affected, person, group, nation, etc., understands that the truth of a thing is usually best arrived at by way of the input of both, or many, sides.

I've often experienced just the opposite of this approach within the political Left, among people who see themselves as radicals, anti-capitalists, socialists, or just conscientious progressive activists, although my sense is that this is changing for the better. These people believe that they have the "correct" view of the world, that those who don't agree are just not as "advanced," and that others need to be "educated" to see the truth (as they see it). It's almost missionary-like, in the worst sense of that term, a form of religious Leftism which ultimately turns people off and is counter-productive.

It also makes it very difficult to build effective coalitions and alliances with groups or constituencies that have their own particular experiences, insights and perspectives that are not the same.

Coalition-Building

In chapter five I wrote of the central strategic need for a popular alliance that would bring together the broad range of constituencies with a direct need in a fundamentally transformed society. Van Jones, in his book *The Green Collar Economy*, puts it this way:

"Now is the time for the green movement to reach out. The bright promise of the green economy could soon include, inspire, and energize people of all races and classes. And nowhere is the need for a politics of hope more profound than it is among America's urban and rural poor. More importantly, climate activists can open the door to a grand historic alliance—a political force with the power to bend history in a new direction. To give the Earth and its people a fighting chance, we need a broad, populist alliance—one that includes every class under the sun and every color in the rainbow." (2)

I'm not sure about "every class;" the corporate class responsible for our plight is overwhelmingly part of the problem, not the solution, but otherwise Jones is on target.

What are the tactics of coalition-building that will make this alliance possible?

We can begin with how **not** to build coalitions.

I've had experience, mainly in the past I'm glad to say, with coalitions within which groups angle for tactical advantage. This means looking upon coalitions as mainly recruiting grounds for their particular primary organization or particular view of the world. It involves an approach

grounded in distrust, a skepticism about others in the coalition. It tends to look for openings to advance the agenda, political positions or ideology of one group. It is ultimately sectarian, divisive and counter-productive.

Elaine Bernard, a labor educator and social change activist, has written and spoken about the role that, sometimes, a labor union can play within a coalition with much smaller and less resourced community groups. That role is, in essence, to be **the** group which sets the agenda and set of dynamics for the coalition. It's close to a "my way or the highway" approach, using a group's power, subtly or not so subtly, to determine the rules of the game for the particular coalition.

This is not the same as recognizing, within a coalition, the different positions and organizational possibilities each group brings to it. Those have to be taken into account. But the key is whether a good faith effort is being made to find the highest level of operational unity that would then allow for more unified, more effective work on the particular objective that brought the coalition together in the first place.

I have called this a "realistically visionary" approach, one which recognizes that each group brings its particular experiences and truths to a coalition setting but that others do too. Ultimately, the way to the broader truth, the most appropriate set of tactics, actions and political approaches, lies in an ability to arrive at that broader truth through a process of give and take among all of the coalition partners. It may be that in the course of that give and take, we will discover that we are not all on the same page, and it may make sense for one coalition to divide and become two. Forced partnerships can be counter-productive for all involved. But even then, even with more than one coalition, we need to create communications links among all, or almost all, of those originally in the attempted broader effort.

We can't separate means and ends. To get to a just and democratic society, we need to build coalitions that model the future we want to bring into being.

We need to learn how to listen to and be honest with each other, respect one another, disagree with each other and deal with those disagreements in ways that are not paternalistic or worse. We need to be straight-up and direct, honest and up-front, while being sensitive to the long histories of racism, sexism and the like which have made such honest communication sometimes difficult. We need to avoid being defensive if we are challenged for making a biased statement, strive to be open to understanding objections from the offended person or group.

If we can build coalitions that strive to be all of these things—realistically visionary, self-consciously comradely, democratic and egalitarian, and challenging of negative ideas and practices—we will be able to make decisions and engage in joint action together in an effective way. We will attract others to us. We will retain the individual and collective strength we need for the struggle. We will finally, as a movement, be living up to the best within us. We can settle for nothing less.

Popular Education in the Context of Work on Issues

Our current President, Barack Obama, was a community organizer for a few years in Chicago, which is a good thing. It's good for the "profession" of community organizing that a U.S. President is known, in part, for having done this. It has undoubtedly inspired young people to consider doing the same thing themselves. And it must have had a positive effect on Obama, given him insights that are of value during his current day job.

And yet, from what I have learned about the kind of community organizing he did, it had serious limitations.

One is that he did it for such a short period of time. Three years is not an insignificant amount of time, but there are people whose entire adult life is spent doing community organizing (or workplace organizing) or being part of organizations for which that is their main work. There are limits to how much can be learned in three years about corporate and government power and the way they work and what is needed if the oppressed and disenfranchised are to get power.

Of more significance, the kind of community organizing that Obama did was not based upon a popular education approach. From the way he described it in his book, *Dreams From My Father*, there was little effort to build popular education into the work he was doing on the issues that were of most immediate concern to the people he was working with in inner-city Chicago.

What is popular education? Here's one way that it is explained, from a popular education news website, www.popednews.org:

"Popular education provides inspiration and hope to communities and people in them who are struggling against oppression and violence. It brings a wide range of resources for improving and strengthening educational work, starting from personal experience, and moving to shared and social understanding. Democratic, participatory educational methods that create inclusion, give voice, and honor each person's humanity are central to this approach. It is centered on people's knowledge, providing tools to help people identify what they know, acknowledging people's understanding of their own problems and having faith in people's ability to find and create the knowledge they need to solve them. It provides a rich repertoire of the use of music, theater, and the arts in educational work. Finally, it builds on actions for democratic change and emphasizes systematic techniques and tools for reflection on that action."

It is a good thing when grassroots people who have never organized to change anything wrong get involved with an effort to do so. It is better when that initial involvement leads to a victory, a success by the campaign.

Successes and victories are important, critical really. It is very hard to sustain people's commitment to a group or a cause if they never see success. That is why some organizers and organizations—Saul Alinsky is/was the best-known proponent—recommend that organizers

intending to “set up shop” in a community first choose an issue to work on where there is a good chance of success, like getting a stop sign or traffic light placed at a busy intersection or a certain person removed or transferred from a position.

This is OK as far as it goes, but the problem is that sometimes this “lowest common denominator” approach carries through to much of the organizing work that continues to take place. For example, an inner city organizing effort, much like Obama’s, can take up work in a public housing project to improve the services being provided--or not provided--by their city landlord but will refuse to allow those being organized to take up an issue like war. The primary organizers will do this even though many of the young people in that housing project are signing up for the military, being sent to Iraq or Afghanistan and, in some cases, returning in a coffin or with serious injuries. They are signing up mainly because they can’t find jobs. It’s called the “poverty draft.”

A popular education approach to organizing, on the other hand, one which did not shy away from allowing people to talk about their deepest concerns and problems, would allow this issue to come to the surface and be discussed collectively by the members of the group. This could well lead to action, participation in an anti-war demonstration or anti-war coalition, for example. Through this experience the members of the organization would be exposed to other people from different backgrounds and with different ideas, which in turn would stimulate their thinking and consciousness. These are good things that should be encouraged, not frustrated.

Popular education is an essential component of the mix of tactics necessary to build a popular movement capable of making a clean energy revolution and, over time, a deeper social, political, and economic revolution. What we need are hundreds of thousands of people who consciously see themselves as organizers for positive social change, working where they are to advance the consciousness, knowledge and willingness to “fight the power” of million and tens of millions. And fortunately, we’re well on our way toward that objective, as indicated by the 15,000 activists and organizers who attended the U.S. Social Forum in Atlanta, Georgia in 2007. I would guess that, on average, for each person in attendance, there were a dozen or so people back home with whom they worked.

Popular education is also a way of increasing the odds that our movement, those who give leadership to it and those who come out of it and are elected to political office, will stay true to our highest ideals and not get corrupted.

This is no small thing. We know from historical experience that the most noble of causes can turn sour, turn into its opposite, become a force of oppression rather than liberation. Individuals who once gave of themselves in heroic proportions can become hollow shells of their former selves, not to mention what can happen to once-revolutionary organizations. The difficulties faced by those who have come to power as a result of their commitment to social and economic justice have led many down the path of corruption in pursuit of personal power, wealth and privileges, or both.

And for that matter, what about Barack Obama's campaign rhetoric, his "yes, we can" spirit, compared with what we have seen over the first year of his Presidency?

This is why we must build into our movement-building process a conscious commitment to cultural change, as I wrote about in chapter four. This includes making the work enjoyable and community-building, personally nourishing for the individuals part of the movement. We must help new people who are getting into this work grow in their consciousness, understanding and commitment to full-scale social change as a bulwark against this historic problem. Leaders, organizations and elected officials must be held accountable.

Effective Mass Mobilization/Strategic Nonviolent Civil Disobedience

Essential, absolutely essential, if we are to have any hope of a clean energy revolution and an all-around justice revolution, is the widespread and growing use of mass demonstrations in the streets and nonviolently disruptive acts of civil disobedience. Fundamental change doesn't happen by way of polite, even not so polite, discussion and debate at meetings and conferences and the lobbying of elected officials. They don't happen because of dynamite websites, or great writing or public speaking, or lots of friends on Facebook. Those are all part of the process of our getting to where we have to go, but much more is needed.

Why is this? Frederick Douglass had it right when he spoke in Canandaigua, N.Y. in 1857: "Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are those who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its waters. The struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did, and it never will."

Mass demonstrations and nonviolent civil disobedience (NVCD) are complementary forms of action, or they should be. What do I mean by these terms?

A mass demonstration is usually (not always) a legal action involving a significant number of people manifesting publicly their particular demands. It is directed in some way at the person/group/institution the demands are being made on—the owner of a factory, the International Monetary Fund or World Bank, a coal plant, government officials, etc. Usually the action will take place directly outside or near the person, group or institution the demands are being made on, often by way of an assembly of people that begins somewhere else and marches together to that specific location. Once there, speeches are made, chants might be chanted, music might be sung, a picket line (a moving demonstration in place) might be held, etc.

Depending upon the issue, the nature of whom the demands are being made on, the professionalism, or not, of the local police, the level of anger and discipline of the demonstrators, and other factors, there can be problems, sometimes serious, with the police. Indeed, down through history, police repression of legal and peaceful, or unarmed, demonstrations has

sometimes generated bigger and stronger demonstrations that, at times, have brought down governments.

Mass demonstrations have an impact, in a whole range of ways. In November 1969 there was a massive demonstration of half a million or so people at the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C. against the war in Vietnam War. The President at the time, Richard Nixon, had a picture taken of himself watching a football game at the time, feigning no interest in what was happening less than a half mile away. But former government officials at the time have since revealed that it was just the opposite, that Nixon and other top level officials were very concerned about the widespread opposition to the war that this demonstration manifested. And in time, on Nixon's watch, the U.S. was forced to withdraw from Vietnam.

They have other effects. They strengthen the individual people who take part as they see that they are not alone in what they think and feel. They give people a sense of their power if they are organized and united. They give encouragement to others who are supportive of the demonstration's message who hear about the action but are not present. They serve to push timid advocates of the changes being sought to be more firm in their day to day work.

Over the last few years, as referred to in chapter 5, the inspired efforts of Bill McKibben and former Middlebury College students working with him has pioneered a new form of mass demonstration, the "distributed action." This was first done on April 16th, 2007 on "Step It Up" day when approximately 150,000 people took action on the climate crisis in over 1400 localities around the U.S. Cumulatively, aided by a sophisticated website/internet operation, they were a breakthrough for the U.S. climate movement. They were the first time such a visible, widespread showing had been made of the massive support for strong action on climate.

Nonviolent civil disobedience, also known as nonviolent direct action or civil resistance, is most times a more risky form of action for those who take part in it. On purpose, those engaging in NVCD put themselves in harm's way, are willing to risk police violence and/or arrest. They do so because they feel strongly about the particular issue and underline the urgency in a way that does so more effectively than a legally permitted demonstration.

The specific form that the action takes can vary. One of the most often used methods is the sit-in or occupation, a physical obstruction or takeover of a street, a doorway, or, in some cases, an entire factory or building. In December of 2008 workers at a factory in Chicago making windows took over their workplace when it became clear that the owners were going to shut down the plant and not honor provisions of the contract with the local branch of the United Electrical Workers Union. Effective media work, good press coverage, smart tactics and a five-day sit-in led to the owner's capitulation to the demands of the workers. And no one was arrested.

These actions usually, though not always, lead to arrests. I have been part of dozens of such actions over the years. Most have led to arrests, 16 for me personally so far, but I remember twice that they did not but still had their intended effect, as in the Chicago example. It was in

connection with my third party (Green Party) campaign for the U.S. Senate in New Jersey in 2002. Here's the full story:

Our campaign had made a decision that we were going to shine the largest spotlight we could on our exclusion from televised debates between the Democratic and Republican candidates. At the first debate, we mobilized 75 of our supporters for a mass demonstration; given the setting, people was felt by all present at the TV station as a "mass." In addition, after demonstrating for over an hour in front of the station, a small group of us made an attempt to go into the building via the front entrance, asserting our right for me to do so as a Senate candidate. I ended up getting myself arrested, handcuffed, jailed briefly and eventually fined for trying to get past several policemen and security guards at the front door.

This turned out to be the best thing our campaign did, our most effective tactic. It led to a virtual explosion of media coverage, not just for that action but afterwards. It put me on the map as someone who couldn't be ignored.

Two weeks later there was a second exclusionary debate, and we decided to escalate. Instead of the essentially symbolic NVCDE act that I had taken at the first one, we determined that we would attempt to physically block the main entrance so that nobody could get into the building. "If Ted can't debate, nobody can!" Eight people volunteered to be part of a group to undertake this task, my wife and 18 year old son among them.

At the appropriate time, the eight sat down right in front of the main doors. They were dragged away by the police. They returned, did the same thing, and got the same treatment, dragged away but not arrested. One more time they did so and the same thing happened. By this point most people coming for the debate had entered, and the police had tightened their security so it was very difficult to even get to the front door, so the night ended with no arrests of our NVCD activists despite three attempts.

Like the debate where I was arrested two weeks earlier, this action also received good press coverage.

Three weeks later we tried again, but this time in a different way. Myself and two campaign volunteers engaged in a sit-in inside the main campaign office of the state Democratic Party out of which the campaign of my Democratic competitor was being run. We had determined that he was the one who was standing in the way of third party candidate involvement in debates, and we ended up staying in his office for nine hours. Finally, in the late evening, the local police in New Brunswick arrived, we were told to stand up and were literally pushed out the door of the office. Expecting to be arrested, we were surprised when we were not.

There had obviously been a tactical decision by my Democratic opponent that he did not want anybody arrested in his campaign office.

All of these actions had their intended effect, though. Two weeks after the sit-in, I and three

All of these actions had their intended effect, though. Two weeks after the sit-in, I and three other third party candidates were part of a C-span-televised, one-hour debate with the Democrat and Republican candidates.

Working With the Press

These examples from my campaign are not just instructive about the potential of nonviolent direct action to achieve results. They're also instructive as far as what can draw media attention to an action, an issue, a cause, a movement.

Generally, there are two kinds of media that we need to be working with, both of them as effectively as possible. One kind could be considered **our** media. This involves everything from email lists to websites to facebook pages and twitter accounts to progressive newspapers, magazines and radio programs. This media is important, essential really, because we will never get either the extensiveness or the accuracy from media owned by corporations or rich people that we can get from media that agrees with us that social change is much in need in the world.

When it comes to working with newspapers, radio, TV or other media that is either corporate-owned or politically centrist or worse, we need to distinguish between individual reporters and the owners.

From my experience, many reporters are people who got into this work because they believed that the journalistic profession was not just a way to make a living but a way to expose corruption, challenge injustice, reveal the truth, make a better world. There is no question that there are journalists throughout all branches of the mass media who continue to see it this way.

And yet, we must also be wary. I had a personal experience with what can happen when you're not when I was working in the office of United for Peace and Justice, a major peace coalition, in February of 2003 helping to organize what turned out to be a demonstration of half a million people in New York City against the planned invasion of Iraq one month later. A young Latina woman from one of the major daily newspapers interviewed me about our plans, what was happening, what we expected. I remember feeling more and more comfortable with her as the interview proceeded, thinking that we were lucky that they sent someone who seemed so sympathetic.

Then the next day, on page 3, was a major story about the upcoming action with a headline and quote from me that gave the impression that we were planning a militant march likely to lead to a confrontation with the police, neither of which was true. Our plan was for a thoroughly peaceful assembly of people for a rally with speakers and music. Period. The problem, however, was that the city had given us a permit to do a rally on 1st Avenue on the east side of Manhattan, but they had explicitly refused to give us a permit for a march, which we had wanted.

We knew that there were huge numbers of people coming, and we knew that member groups of

We knew that there were huge numbers of people coming, and we knew that member groups of our coalition were gathering their members at certain locations in Manhattan so that they could come together to the east side. We knew that these would become, in essence, “marches” on the sidewalks, at least, and that if the numbers were very large that they would spill over into the streets. And we were right, far more than we expected. Tens of thousands of people ended up blocking traffic as they, of necessity, took to the streets to get from subway stops through Manhattan’s narrow streets to the east side. And there were tense moments, some injuries and some arrests, with an ill-prepared police force as this took place.

Fortunately, the distortions of what I had said to the reporter had absolutely no impact on the turnout for the event. Perhaps it helped it, I have no idea.

Some political activists have a hostile attitude, for understandable reasons, toward reporters from corporate-owned media outlets that tend to be more mouthpieces for government or corporate policies than truth-seeking journalistic enterprises. This is a mistake, as a general policy. Sympathetic reporters, sympathetic because they are progressive or as a result of interaction with our movement, can argue with their editors or bosses for a more truthful report of what we are doing and why. This happens, and sometimes they win. And over time, as a movement builds and builds and refuses to back down, more and more journalists and mid-level editors, even higher-ups, will be influenced such that more favorable coverage can come about over time.

Industries and corporations are dependent upon workers at bottom levels to do the work that allows them to make money. For example, the military is dependent upon soldiers to do the killing. If soldiers refuse to do so, or put up resistance, changes can come. This is exactly what happened during the Vietnam War when the draft resistance/peace movement in the United States spread to the army. The massive GI resistance movement that emerged was instrumental in the eventual withdrawal from Vietnam by the United States.

If it can happen with soldiers in the midst of a war, it can certainly happen with individual reporters and journalists, and it does.

There are a whole series of techniques that come with effective media work: doing actions which are creative and different, with interesting visuals; using people with name recognition in press conferences or events to attract interest; following up emails or faxes with phone calls. But the bottom line is, as much as possible, we need to develop personal connections and develop relationships, on-going relationships, with reporters willing to listen and interested in our issues.

Finally, like it or not, we must work with and bring pressure on elected officials, and we must be actively involved in the electoral process.

- FOOTNOTES: 1) Antonio Gramsci, “The Formation of Intellectuals,” from *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*
2) Van Jones, *The Green Collar Economy*, p. 59