

Living Revolution

A 10-point plan to stop Trump and make gains in justice and equality

George Lakey January 23, 2017

I was among the 100,000 who marched in San Francisco's Women's March the day after Donald Trump's inauguration. While enthusiasm for the struggle seemed high, an important question was looming: What's the strategic plan, as we head into the Trump era? Although there's no simple answer, I offer this 10-point plan fully open for discussion and debate.

1. Recognize that we represent the majority, not Trump.

Three times more people participated in the Women's March in Washington, D.C., than were present at the inauguration the day before. He lost the popular vote in the election. Many of his own voters admitted in exit polls that they consider him unqualified to be president. Furthermore, Trump plans to target progressive policies that polls find to be supported by solid majorities of Americans.

Trump does have strengths in addition to his brilliance in manipulating mainstream media. Key parts of the economic elite have decided that they can use him for their own goals. So, they will support him — as long as he can deliver acceleration of school privatization, for example, or the fossil fuel pipelining of America. His core voting base (the minority of a minority) may support him for a period, until his failure to deliver unrealistic promises becomes apparent.

Even before the inauguration, he alienated significant parts of the security state that he needs to depend on. He needs a vast professional bureaucracy to carry out his will, but it has many subtle ways of thwarting him. Harry Truman famously admitted, publicly, his frustration after he was repeatedly stymied by an uncooperative bureaucracy.

Trump's bullying is both a strength and a weakness. His style alienates many, including among his own voters, and stirs opposition.

Stopping Trump is not a slam dunk, but it is possible when he is given his due as a cagey opponent. It also helps when we decide to be strategic rather than led by fear and moral outrage, jumping from whichever tactic feels good in the moment, but has little impact. Now is the time when we can identify his **pillars of support** (<http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/pillars-fall-social-movements-can-win-victories-like-sex-marriage/>) and lay plans to undermine them.

2. Strengthen civic institutions and their connections with targeted populations.

Trump will continue to turn to the age-old weapon of scapegoating to shore up his working-class base, and he'll feel more pressure to do that as his own programs for "making America great again" fail to deliver the goods to that base — even while enriching the economic elite.

Some sanctuary cities have already made a good start by declaring their resistance to anti-immigrant moves by the federal government. Activists can reinforce these initiatives with a range of civic and religious institutions, urging them to strengthen their connections with scapegoated groups like Jews, immigrants and African Americans. The civics may not by themselves always think of this, so it may take activists within or near the alert them to their responsibility of solidarity.

Because we are the majority, we can make full use of **Bill Moyer's four roles of social change** (<http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/bill-moyer-four-roles-of-social-change/>) Consider: How advocates, helpers, organizers and rebels strengthen their solidarity impact? Training for Change organizer Daniel Hunter brainstormed some possible moves: Advocates persuade cities and states to give drivers licenses to undocumented people. Organizers create circles of solidarity in which citizens could physically intervene when immigrants are in danger —and surround the vulnerable ones. (The New Sanctuary Movement in Philadelphia calls this "sanctuary in the streets.") Helpers could insist that they provide food and healthcare to people in deportation centers, and if entry is refused, collaborate with rebels to break in with food and risk arrest.

3. Play offense, not defense.

The last time progressives in the United States faced this degree of danger was when Ronald Reagan became president. One of Reagan's first acts was to fire the air traffic controllers when they went on strike, putting into question national air safety. Strategically, he chose "shock and awe," and it worked — most of the U.S. movements for change went on the defensive.

Gandhi and military generals agree: No one wins anything of consequence on the defensive. I define "defensive" as trying to maintain previous gains. U.S. movements in 1980 made many gains in the previous two decades. Understandably, they tried to defend them. As Gandhi and generals would predict, the movements instead ground to the "Reagan Revolution" and, for the most part, have lost ground ever since.

One exception stands out: the LGBT movement. Instead of defending, for example, local gains in city human relations commissions, LGBT people escalated in the 1980s with ACT-UP leading the way. They followed up with the campaign for equal marriage and escalated again with the demand for equality in the military.

LGBT people proved that Gandhi and the generals are right: The best defense is an offense.

I hear many American progressives unconsciously talking about Trump defensively, preparing to make precisely the same mistake as an older generation did with Reagan. The LGBT's lesson is obvious: heighten nonviolent direct action campaigns and start new ones. Instead of defending Obamacare, let's push for an even more comprehensive health solution, like Medicare for all.

A direct action campaign (<http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/election-campaigns-one-off-protests/>) is defined by a pressing issue, a clear demand, and a target that can yield that

demand. Powerful social movements, even those that overthrew military dictatorships, have often been built in exactly this way.

These days, campaign design needs to take account of the recent impact of social media. Because many people have allowed social media to draw them into an isolating bubble, activists need to design campaigns that deliberately increase their base through building relationships “beyond the choir.” Increased use of training may be necessary to maximize impact.

4. Link campaigns to build movements.

Standing Rock is a current example of the synergistic and expanding effect of linking campaigns. Pipeline fights, indigenous rights, and even the role of Veterans for Peace — in raising questions about the U.S. empire — were all amplified through linking to the ongoing campaign in North Dakota.

The classic American example of campaign linkage grew from the simple act of four college students in North Carolina on Feb. 1, 1960, starting their campaign to desegregate a lunch counter. Students in other towns followed the example, and the wave of sit-ins became a movement. The movement helped grow existing organizations — for example, the Congress of Racial Equality, or CORE, which then started a new kind of campaign, the Freedom Rides. Multiple freedom rides were linked and further built the strength of the civil rights movement.

These campaigns did not have the American majority on their side, nor did they win all their demands, but their cumulative value forced major changes and eventually changed public opinion as well. The civil rights movement illustrates the crucial difference in mode of operation between direct action campaigns and political parties’ campaigns.

Democrats, for example, are hugely about polls and focus groups. Their power rests on current public opinion and its manipulation through electioneering and political maneuver. Even for progressive-inclined Democrats, the ability to act is tightly limited by the narrow range of current opinion (not to mention by what the economic elite is willing to allow).

Social movements, by contrast, can take stands that go beyond current opinion and wage campaigns that have transformative impact, such as women’s right to vote, gay rights and stopping pipelines. This difference helps explain why progressive Democrats habitually fight defensively, while movements are free to stay on the offensive and win. Bernie Sanders, for example, is now defensively fighting to save Medicare. By contrast, a social movement is free to launch a fight for single-payer health care. Such a struggle could threaten to split part of Trump’s working class base and — even if it failed to fully achieve its goal — save more of Medicare.

5. Link movements to create a movement of movements.

When times are out of joint, a successful movement around one issue inspires campaigns on other issues to and become new movements. That’s what happened the last time the U.S. took major steps toward justice. The civil rights movement begat the Berkeley Free Speech campaign and the national student movement for university reform, the draft resistance campaign and the anti-Vietnam war movement, and so on — energizing, seniors, people with disabilities, mental health consumers, women, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, auto workers many more.

With so many movements developing, A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin catalyzed the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, hoping to start linking movements into a movement of movements. They glimpsed an opportunity to amass so much power independent of the major parties that the United States could develop a counter-force to the economic elite and bring about democratic socialism.

Creating an independent movement of movements was the successful path taken by the Scandinavians, and both Randolph and Rust wanted it for the United States. Substantial linkage, however, was not available at that time. For one thing, the U.S. economy was booming, there wasn't enough discontent in the white working class — let alone the burgeoning middle class — to create an opening. What's more, racism was still too intense, although the United Auto Workers had successfully found a way forward by uniting black and white workers to fight employers in the auto industry. In the past half century, much has changed on both those dimensions.

My point is that multiple campaigns on the same or similar issues generates a movement, and that multiple movements provide the opportunity for a movement of movements. The closer we come to that point, the more pressure there is on the Democrats to co-opt us. The Republicans' historic role is usually repression, while the Democrats' job is to limit and control grassroots movements by pulling them into the party.

We saw that happen to the later stage of the civil rights movement and again with the Democrat-embraced health reform movement of 2007-9, when the single-payer option — and even the public option — was dropped to pass the medical industrial complex-friendly Affordable Care Act.

When a social movement is independent, it can force the Democrats to become allies instead of controllers. The civil rights movement did exactly that before 1965; we see what it can look like in the excellent film “Selma. On a more micro level, Daniel Hunter — in his book “Strategy and Soul” — reveals how a neighborhood-based movement forced politicians to come to the campaigners, instead of the campaigners seeking help from the politicians.

Whatever our partisan sympathies, a quick look at political trends in the United States shows why movement independence is more crucial now than at any time in the last half-century.

Public alienation from the major parties — Republican or Democratic — has gone off the charts. Voters stay away from the polls, as if afraid of catching germs. The Tea Party gains more cred when it trashes the Republican Party. Donald Trump reassures his voter base by verbally attacking Congress — both parties, no less — in his inaugural address. Much of his voter base had long since left the Democratic Party because of its own betrayal of working-class interests. Black working-class voters also signaled their alienation by failing to give full support to Hillary Clinton, despite Barack and Michelle Obama's entreaties.

Such a period of alienation is just the time for direct action campaigns that fight for progressive demands — \$15 per hour and Medicare for all — to signal independence from the politicians who bear so much responsibility for U.S. decline. Such independence appeals to the vast majority, including many Trump voters. A self-respecting movement of movements knows that the Democrats will then come to them and offer to be allies.

6. Avoid one-off demonstrations.

This political moment adds force to the sizable advantage of direct action campaigns over single demonstrations, however large. Protests are by their nature reactive. In these next years, predictably, Trump will act again and progressives will react, then Trump will act again and progressives will react again. Trump, an accomplished fighter, knows that staying on the offensive is what enables him to win. Progressives, often led by people with a track record of loss, take the bait and react, over and over.

Simple protests, no matter what the issue, essentially signal to Trump that he is winning — he has manipulated us into reacting.

I realize that reactivity is a habit among many activists, and may take heroic self-discipline to avoid. An alternative is to organize a campaign, or join a campaign near you, even if the issue is not your favorite, and plunge in with full talent and energy.

7. Heighten the contrast in confrontations between the campaigners' behavior and our right wing opponents.

Many have noted Trump's signals to his white supremacist and other allies that violence is an acceptable means to use against us.

This is an old story in the United States, and there's no reason to let it throw us. Through clear nonviolent policy, like that of the Women's March that urged against bringing anything that could be considered a weapon, we remain centered and able to attract large numbers. Some movements have made grave mistakes by responding to violent attacks in kind, losing ground on their goals as a result. Others have performed brilliantly, as did the civil rights campaigns that faced down the largest sustained terrorist organization in U.S. history, the KKK, often without protection from local law enforcement and even federal authorities.

The **Global Nonviolent Action Database** (<http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>) presents campaigns in almost 200 countries, including many nations where repressive violence was far worse than it has been in the United States. The database makes it possible to search for campaigns that faced repressive violence and to learn how they handled it. It is easy to find out, therefore, what worked and what didn't, and to reinforce the lessons through training.

8. Aim to unite around a vision for justice, equality and freedom.

Individuals, campaigns, and movements all gain greater power and credibility through projecting a vision of what they want, as well as what they don't want. They grow more easily, withstand attacks more easily, and have an easier time maintaining their boldness and creativity. "Protest movements" like Occupy are notoriously fragile and precarious; sustainable movements like the struggle for LGBT rights and equality have a liberating vision. The homophobes were right: We did have a "homosexual agenda!"

The good news is that on August 1, 2016, **the Movement for Black Lives** <http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/a-vision-for-black-lives-is-a-vision-for-everyone/>

offered a vision that can be a draft for dialogue for many campaigns and movements. Many groups have already endorsed it. The vision is bold, substantive and so different from the present that it is even in alignment with the best practices of the Nordic countries. In that sense, it is highly practical and backed by a half-century track record. Compared with the volatile and shifting Donald Trump act, a rough agreement on vision by a movement of movements could enhance our credibility and divide his base.

9. Make the vision more real by extending new economy institutions and coops.

These often fly under the radar in our highly politicized discourse, so two things need to happen. People who active in campaigns and movement development need to honor the development of economic infrastructure that reflects the values of our united vision.

Second, the **new economy institutions** (<http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/can-new-economy-labor-movements-come-together/>) need to brand themselves as part of the justice movement, giving up advantages of modesty. They may find new advantages and surprising opportunities for growth. After all, a majority of Americans polled have already said they like the concept of employee-owned companies.

10. See U.S. polarization as opportunity.

Donald Trump frames U.S. polarization in ways that benefit him, trying to increase the loyalty of his base. Many progressives decry the polarization, as if their upset at its ugly manifestations will make it go away. The reality is that the polarization is fundamentally linked to economic inequality and was growing for years before Trump came forward. It is not going away. The question is how to manage our fears and learn to navigate the stormy waters.

The good news is that the greatest polarization in Scandinavian history — Nazis vs. Communists in the 1920s and '30s — was also the time when broad people's movements made their breakthrough, pushed the domination of their economic elites aside and invented a new model of economic justice. The polarization did not stop them — if anything, the movements used the opportunity.

Yes, polarization is dangerous. Germany and Italy polarized when Sweden and Norway did, but went fascist. Their movements made huge mistakes, mistakes avoided by the Swedes and Norwegians. Our most recent period of great polarization in the United States was also dangerous, but the 1960s and '70s was our period greatest progress since the polarized 1930s.

In short, there's good reason to see the Trump era as an opportunity not only to stop him, but to make major gains in justice and equality. It will help to learn to turn our fear into power. We'll also need strategy, and the humility to learn from successes of other movements that have come out ahead during hard times. It is not rocket science. If we're willing to shift personal habits and priorities, support each other through hardship, come together on a plan, we can win. That is our opportunity.

