

**WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CITIZENS STAND UP:
TURNING MASS DISCONTENT INTO A MASS MOVEMENT**

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Although my work for many decades has focused on international peacebuilding, I am going to speak today about the US and the epic struggle to use our tools and values to turn mass discontent into a mass movement.

The most unusual election in US history was followed by the most chaotic transition and led us into the strangest, most bizarre, and certainly most dangerous presidency imaginable. Funded by billionaires with the extraordinary power of endless money, this right wing cabal catapulted Trump to the White House. America's uneven and unjust system of economic and social rewards made it possible for a tiny minority to become extremely wealthy and able to deeply influence the presidency, control the media, undermine democracy, and seduce the working class with a pseudo populism that will betray their loyalty. This "dark money," meaning money with no visible source, threatens the American and international liberal order. Its capacity and determination cannot be underestimated. (See Jane Mayer's book *Dark Money* and her article in the March 27, 2017 *New Yorker*).

On Election night, November 2016, colleagues and I watched the evidence accumulate that Trump would win. First we were incredulous, then despairing. How can it be that the adversary of every decent accomplishment of our movement for peace and justice can speak for America? How can he, who insults our intelligence and our humanity at every moment, govern the US and threaten global populations and the biosphere? How can the world survive this catastrophe?

Those of us who care about a just and peaceful work are in a state of shock and outrage. Residing in the progressive state of Massachusetts, we do not know many Trump voters, and our gaping divisions between "us and them" have become part of the problem. These divisions of class, culture, and experience have existed since the original settlement in the 1600s of what became the US. We are seeing the consequences of the unrecognized and unmet basic human needs of the white working class, both on the material and psychological planes. Research by psychiatrist James Gilligan of Harvard, Archbishop Tutu of South Africa, and so many others, documents the origins of anti-social or violent behavior arising from a lifetime of humiliation, indignity, and disrespect as well as from lack of hope and opportunity.

What Trump gave his working class voters was a sense that they mattered, not just their votes, but their culture. This sector of the US electorate feels that it has been standing in line for decades waiting for a slice of the American pie. Now, perhaps since the election of an African American president, it seems to them that minorities and migrants have cut into the line, leaving them further marginalized and

despairing of ever climbing up the economic ladder. Our challenge as peacebuilders is to seek common ground and build new alliances across these very real social, economic, and political gaps. This may be our hardest task.

In the days that followed the election, left-leaning communities around the US mobilized rapidly, recognizing the need to harness and organize this outpouring of passion for maximum impact and effectiveness. Around the country, we see that people refuse to be helpless or immobilized by despair. Many people who have not been politically active seek ways to engage and resist. Local events meant for 50 bring out 200 and those organizing for 200 stand in awe as 500 people arrive. The lessons of history have taught our communities that to be a bystander is to be guilty by association. What we need now are disciplined and trained “upstanders” emboldened to stand in opposition to the new regime.

We observe that our local organizing forms part of a spontaneously arising web of national activity. We are building a national movement based on theories of nonviolent social change that we as scholar-practitioners have taught for decades. Peter Woodrow and others at Collaborative Development Associates in Boston, who focus on measuring peacebuilding effectiveness, document the importance of mobilizing both masses of people and key people for sustainable social change. This is clearly a current strategy in the US resistance to the current crisis, visible on multiple fronts.

As colleagues and I gather local groups, 4 major strategies emerge that become our framework for both macro and micro efforts. Each of these approaches arises from our commitment to nonviolent conflict transformation. We are glad to know that studies of Gandhi’s success reveal that operating on multiple fronts creates a stronger movement than putting all our energies into just one approach. (see Engler in *Waging Nonviolence*, March 17, 2017).

Resistance, Protection, Creation, and Connection:

- Resistance to every single appointment, regressive legislative initiative, executive order; environmental desecration, and calling out every instance of hateful speech, threatening act, and insult.
- Protection for undocumented residents, refugees and immigrants, minorities from all identity groups and for the earth, whose demands cannot wait for the next election cycle. America’s strength has always been its diversity; that vision demands our absolute allegiance and protection.
- Creation of the new organizations, institutions, and society we wish to manifest while we dismantle the old
- Connection to each other by expanding our circles for greater inclusion of those we have not taken time to know

Resistance shows up through demonstrations, protest marches, calls to elected officials, media postings, campaigns to counter environmental destruction or attacks on identity groups, for instance, and extensive nonviolence training for current and future actions. We are concerned that the right to peaceful assembly will be challenged and that skills in nonviolent resistance will be essential to protect our constitutionally guaranteed right. Nonviolence trainings are being offered widely, within and across identity groups. The civil rights movement is recent enough in history for us elders to have participated. We know what is coming and want our activist communities to be prepared.

Our need to protect the vulnerable has given rise to a modern sanctuary movement, which has its roots in the original Judeo-Christian concept of Sanctuary, where persons fleeing the law could go to places of worship and be protected. This concept can also be found in ancient Roman law, medieval canon law and British common law, and in the US during the abolitionist movement against slavery and in the Underground Railroad. Dusted off for modern use, sanctuary has spread from coast to coast, engaging religious leaders, university administrators, mayors, and citizen advocacy groups. The Trump administration is threatening curtailment of federal funds, and we expect a showdown on this issue in the coming months.

Many US cities, college campuses, and places of worship are now declaring themselves sanctuaries, pledging to protect vulnerable individuals from arrest or deportation despite demands threats by federal agents. The ACLU, the American Civil Liberties Union, finds its inbox flooded with donations. Contributions to the organization increased by 7,000% since the election. They have collected "roughly 120,000 donations totaling more than \$7.2 million," and are seeing a "fiftyfold increase in gifts." ACLU lawyers appear at airports and border crossings to support arriving immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers harassed by officials. These defiant efforts strive to overcome the atmosphere of hate and fear and I believe give courage to both the persecuted and their protectors that the government shall not have the last word.

One promising result of the urge to protect the vulnerable has arisen from the Muslim American community, themselves a marginalized group. In response to desecration of Jewish cemeteries and over 100 threats to synagogues in various regions of the US, Muslim Americans have stood up to offer labor and funds to repair cemeteries and protect their Jewish neighbors. Given the tension between Muslims and Jews concerning Israel, this is an especially generous and caring protective response. It increases understanding of a common interest and a common destiny that is often lacking and greatly needed to build a powerful movement for change. Of course these are small groups with approximately 3% Muslim and 3% Jewish populations in the US but the symbolism carries an impact beyond the numbers.

Something profound is emerging. It is hard to control and direct, and there is so far no Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela to lead it. As you can hear, there is an unmistakably bold, pervasive, and hopefully unstoppable response at all levels and

across many sectors and geographies. We hope that it will not be derailed by all the tools of power, vast sums of money, media manipulation, and threats available to the politicians. In many case studies, we see that such threats further embolden citizen activists, leading to escalating rather than diminished engagement.

We have spoken of resistance and protection; we turn now to creation and connection, the other two elements in our design. Moments of creation multiply as new action groups are formed, such as Black Lives Matter and its white ally counterpart called SURG, Standing Up for Racial Justice. The creation of an envisioned society occurs as people organize Upstander trainings, food cooperatives, alternative schools, solar energy for electricity, or launch educational degrees in Conflict Transformation, Resistance Studies, or Environmental Racism. Governors of the west coast states are providing great leadership for the accelerating progressive agendas at the state and local level even as national government moves backwards. These leaders have stated openly that they will defy national legislation that impacts their communities and environment, and again we might anticipate conflict that will pit local and states rights against federal authority.

NY Times: California's clean-air agency voted on March 23 to push ahead with stricter emissions standards for cars and trucks, setting up a potential legal battle with the Trump administration over the state's plan to reduce planet-warming gases.

Here's an example of a new organization called Indivisible, which created an online Guide for activists. Since December, the guide has been downloaded over a million times. More than 4,500 local groups have signed up to resist the Trump agenda in nearly every congressional district in the country. People are putting the guide into action—showing up en masse to congressional district offices and events, and flooding the congressional phone lines.

The US election, as mentioned earlier, reflects a critical lack of connection, our fourth element, between progressives and conservatives. We have lost a common source of info and interpretation. Separate media outlets target different political constellations, resulting in echo chambers that exclude alternative points of view. We on the left ignored the fact that too many of our citizens feel marginalized and left out of the globalized, well-educated, and wired world. Conservative voters, as in Brexit, expressed their anger, disappointment, and fundamental needs for recognition, opportunity, and a chance to participate in the general prosperity.

We who are engaged in this struggle against their chosen president and party now must find a way to acknowledge their reality. We have studied and taught the politics of exclusion and its inevitable consequences all over the world. I cannot be glib on this issue because our separation is of utmost consequence. It is incumbent upon us to find common ground and overlapping interests, which we hope will arise from mutual needs to protect health care, public schools, the environment, and

more, although none of that has happened yet. What exists now is a great deal of demonization of each other's beliefs and behaviors.

While it is essential that Jews and Muslims connect, that non-Natives join with Native American struggles, and absolutely essential that white Americans build solidarity with African Americans, we must also connect around these cavernous political differences. Colleagues and I are currently engaged in dialogue training, using it to bridge gaps wherever possible, but the reach is long and the parties are guarded by fears and both actual and perceived disparities.

Perhaps the most dramatic manifestation of the new politics coming into existence to resist, protect land and people, create, and connect emerged in the past months through the Native American movement to protect their water from an oil pipeline at a place called Standing Rock in South Dakota on the American plains. Thousands of people from the US, Canada, and around the world joined the Native Americans in their encampment, including a group of US veterans who apologized to the tribal chiefs for the violence inflicted on Native peoples over the centuries.

Unfortunately, under the Trump regime the pipeline will be built, but I believe great awareness was raised and new links formed that will continue as the oil industry proposes new and egregious harms to people and the earth in both marginalized and mainstream communities. At this moment my own community is mobilizing with nonviolence training to protect a state forest reserve from yet another pipeline.

Am I optimistic? Despair and optimism continually arise and continually pass away. The rise of the rightwing in the US, Europe, Israel, and more, unravels everything I have worked for over a lifetime as an international peacebuilder, professor, and activist. Our colleagues at this conference have spoken about global climate, refugees, starvation, xenophobia, and the ever-present threat of the world's stockpiled weapons. From all of that, great despair arises.

On the other hand, the outpouring of energy in the US, my focus for this talk, provides an opportunity for significant social, economic, and political change that is long overdue, because late state capitalism does not serve our precarious and threatened planet. From that, optimism arises. If people give up and stay home, we will have to assess our strategies, learn from errors, and regroup.

I truly feel that we cannot indulge our mental states of despair. We have no choice but to wake up together, to develop valiant and empowering actions through our well-developed theories of social change, and to build a national and international movement for peace and justice. Too much is at stake to fail. Giving up is not an option.

I am going to close with a fragment from a poem written decades ago by US feminist poet Adrienne Rich, but very apt for today:

My heart is moved by all I cannot save:
So much has been destroyed.
I have to cast my lot with those
Who, age after age, perversely,
With no extraordinary power,
Reconstitute the world.

Dr. Paula Green has 40 years experience as a psychologist, peace educator, consultant, and mentor in the field of inter-group relations and conflict resolution. In 1994 she founded the Karuna Center for Peacebuilding, a highly regarded US-based NGO focused on international conflict transformation, inter-communal dialogue and reconciliation. She is Professor Emerita at the School for International Training in the US, where she founded and directed CONTACT, the Conflict Transformation Across Cultures Program, with its two annual institutes and graduate certificate program for peacemakers from around the world. Her work has taken her to many regions of Africa, Asia, the Mid East, and Europe, as well as within the US where she resides, consults, and teaches.

In 2009, Paula received an award from the Dalai Lama as an “Unsung Hero of Compassion.” The Unsung Heroes award is presented to “*individuals who, through their loving kindness and service to others, have made their communities and our world a better place.*” She also won the “Psychology of Peace and Justice Prize” from Psychologists for Social Responsibility, 2012, as well as a “Leadership and Service as a Peacemaker” award and a Human Rights award.