

Changing Concepts of Change

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I'd like to open this discussion by giving you an idea of the radical changes that have taken place in concepts of revolutionary change during my lifetime.

I was born in 1915 during World War I, two years before the 1917 Russian Revolution which was the first successful revolution in history dedicated to creating an alternative to capitalism. The revolution succeeded (1) because the Russian workers, peasants, soldiers and sailors facing defeat in the war with Germany, desperately wanted "Peace, Bread and Land;" and had organized themselves into Soviets to get these; and (2) because the Bolshevik party, under Lenin's leadership, recognizing that the Menshevik government couldn't meet these demands, seized the opportunity to take power. The Allies had to end WWI because it looked like the Russian Revolution was going to inspire similar revolutions all over Europe.

When I became a "Movement activist" in 1941, the Russian Revolution was the model of revolutionary change for most radicals. For many revolutionaries (and counter-revolutionaries) it still is.

In the early 1940s radicals all over the world, including the United States, struggled with one another (sometimes physically) over whether Russia and the Soviet Union, despite its concentration camps was still a "workers state" because it had not re-privatized the means of production.

In those days, strange as it may seem now, ownership of the means of production by a workers state was the criterion for a socialist revolution. Ever since the French Revolution in 1789, most progressives believed that the government was responsible for making life better for working people and that the responsibility of radicals was to mobilize the workers to increase the pressure on governments or to take over the government to do so. The debate was mainly over whether these improvements could be achieved gradually (Reform) or only by the workers taking state power (Revolution). It was also taken for granted that technological development and constant expansion of our material powers were progressive. No one in the radical movement talked about the contradictions inherent in unlimited economic and technological expansion.

Meanwhile, American Negroes had seized the opportunity provided by Hitler and Tojo to carry on the Double V struggle against Jim Crow and for Democracy, abroad AND at home, beginning with the March on Washington Movement and then by local struggles, mostly in war plants. Then in 1945, the U.S. ended the Pacific war by dropping the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and humanity was faced with the reality that we had expanded our material powers to the point that we could destroy ourselves and our planet.

This crucial juncture in human evolution required a profound change in the way we think about everything, including revolutionary struggle. As Einstein put it, “the splitting of the atom has changed everything but the way we think, and thus we drift towards catastrophe.” Or in the words of J. Robert Oppenheimer, “The physicists have known sin and this is a knowledge that they cannot lose.”

No longer could we view radical social change as a change only in property relations or in transferring power from the top to the bottom. Henceforth, we needed to conceive of it as a process that transforms both ourselves and our institutions, that fuses politics with ethics and integrates ends and means.

The civil rights movement, launched by the Montgomery Bus Boycott fifty years ago, in 1955, was the first struggle by an oppressed people in Western society from this new ethical and evolutionary perspective. Before the eyes of the whole world, a people who had been treated as less than human struggled against their dehumanization not as angry victims or rebels but as new men and women, representatives of a new more human society. By bearing in mind that their goal was not only desegregating buses but the beloved community, they inspired the human identity and ecological movements which for the last forty years have been creating a cultural revolution in the United States.

Together, these movements have opened up everything to question: all forms of hierarchy in government, education, the economy and the family, racial and gender relations, patriarchy, whiteness, capitalism, science, industry, technology, disability, the meaning of progress. We are in the midst of a great sea-change, which is portrayed in this simple graphic by Marc Luyckx, a Belgian philosopher who at one time headed the Futuring Commission of the European Union.

Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson in their book, *The Cultural Creatives*, published in 2000 (before 9/11), estimate that 35-50 % of the American people have been participants or supporters of these culture-changing movements and believe that progress lies in continuing to eliminate hierarchy in our relationships with one another, in all our institutions, and with the Earth.

We will not be able to build a movement for radical change in this country as long as our only concept of revolution remains the 1917 Russian Revolution scenario of angry masses demanding ‘bread, peace and land’ and seizing power under the leadership of a vanguard party. Or, as Margaret Wheatley puts it in *Leadership and Modern Science*, as long as we are still thinking of change quantitatively in terms of masses and Newtonian physics rather than organically and locally, in terms of webs and quantum physics.

“In a web, the potential impact of local actions bears no relationship to their size. When we choose to act locally, we may be wanting to influence the entire system. But we work where we are, with the system that we know, the one we can get our arms around. From a Newtonian perspective, our efforts often seem too small, and we doubt that our actions will make a difference. Or perhaps we hope that our small efforts will contribute

incrementally to large-scale change. Step by step, system by system, we aspire to develop enough mass or force to alter the larger system.

"But a quantum view explains the success of small efforts quite differently. Acting locally allows us to be inside the movement and flow of the system, participating in all those complex events occurring simultaneously. We are more likely to be sensitive to the dynamics of this system, and thus more effective. However, changes in small places also affect the global system, not through incrementalism, but because every small system participates in an unbroken wholeness. Activities in one part of the whole create effects that appear in distant places. Because of these unseen connections, there is potential value in working anywhere in the system. We never know how our small activities will affect others through the invisible fabric of our connectedness. I have learned that in this exquisitely connected world, it's never a question of 'critical mass.' It's always about 'critical connections.'

In Latin America and elsewhere in the two-thirds world that has not yet been overtaken by the Newtonian and Scientific Rationalist thinking of Western society, new strategies of revolutionary change along these lines are being projected. In El Salvador, for example, Rubén Zamora, President of the Democratic Union, reflecting on 20th century revolutions in which taking state power has enabled the state to take over the popular movement, proposes that instead of struggling for state power (a war of movement), we should concentrate on the construction of power from below (a war of position) through horizontal alliances.

On January 1, 1994 the Zapatistas, based in communities of indigenous peoples, captured the imagination of revolutionaries all over the world by their armed takeover of Mexican cities - OT with the goal of taking power but in order to create spaces for all sections of society to enter into non-violent democratic discussion of how to create new infrastructures from below.

It is estimated that around the world there are literally thousands of small groups creating these grassroots infrastructures, for example, the tree-planting groups in Kenya for which Wangari Matthei recently received the Nobel Prize. Last fall, at a Bioneers Conference, Paul Hawken, said that if you were scroll- list all these groups, as is done with the credits at the end of movies, 24 hours would not be enough to include them all..

I don't know, no one knows, what forms change may take in the future. All we know is that as capitalism becomes increasingly pathological, as it transforms all our human relations into commodity relations, we need to leave behind us the Power struggle scenarios which are still at the back of most of our minds and which dominated the Black Power struggles of the 1960s, and begin thinking of new ways to build the movements needed to bring about fundamental changes in our relationships to one another and to our biosphere.

DISCUSSION

JoeR: After 9/11 we thought of ourselves; despair rather than taking over streets, White House.

RobertoM: Power of network, of connectedness.

Bob L: Hoping for movement out of this gathering.

MaxS: We have to be reflection of new society rather than capitalistic ourselves.

FrankJ: Old ideas die hard. Right sees world going to hell; Left sees loss of past progress.. Need new paradigms, e.g. Arundhati Roy: Another World is Possible.

Tracy: See a lot happening with people at edge of survival who have everything to lose

Sarah: Is there a role for mass mobilization, Protest?

Rich: Hope in Bolivia, Zapatistas, Venezuela. But things also happening here, tho not at

mobilization stage.

BillyB: We can't just protest. Angela Davis was asked by student for advice. She said 'I can't answer because tools we used didn't work..' With so many different fronts it seems like we're spinning wheels.

SoniaH: Not 'enemies.'

RonnieL: Shd focus on what we want, not just struggle against. We in this room represent people in the country. Need to recognize positive/negative in everything.

FrankH: Consider myself a soldier in struggle to overthrow imperialism; really hate capm

WillC: We're all here on Planet Earth. What is causing culture to become extinct? If

we're taking responsibility to create a new culture, a new civilization, what kind of demonstrations should we hold? Maybe 3 days of Music?

RosaN We are our own culture. How do we work with that? A community that incorporates all our ways of being.

Margo: How can we heal ourselves in this pathological culture? Eliminate Western ways of fragmented thinking?

ScottK: Gís method is thinking dialectically, historically. Need to see ourselves bringing together different non-western cultures.

ErrolH: How do we make peace possible for our children? Don't think one class or group is revolutionary? How do we push humanity forward?

LilaC: So important to connect with our humanity.

JoeR: I'm not here because I hate anybody. I'm here because I love life. We need Water, Air, Food. The more we recognize this, the more we're moving to Hope. We respect Life, therefore we're not for Violence. I want to devote myself to Water and Children.

Walter S: What do we think Life is?

Bob L: Christ mobilized thousands with a simple philosophy based on Love. We have to love our enemies to change them.

GRACE: MOVEMENT-BLDG, unlike radical organizing, is essentially counter-cultural. E.g. Emma's article 'Education isn't only about Reading.' We can help create a movement by helping school 'dropouts' to see themselves collectively, and not just individually, i.e. as 'walkouts' against outmoded factory-model school system.

FrankH: No movement without local work.

RonnieL: Left didn't organize in our own communities.

DavidW: Right started out locally, with school boards.

Rosa: How do you organize locally without organizing people in this room?

Challenge is to find individuals in the mass. Can't do that until we know ourselves.

SarahT: How do we model dialogues?

Ronnie L: Not either/or

FrankH: Without health care I'm dead.

FrankJ: Can't have consumer model for health care.

David W: Public space being diminished.

Frank: Can we agree on an issue to organize around?

RobertoM: As people move from South to North, immigration issue becoming critical.

Need to struggle for freedom of movement of people, not just of trade.

Bob L: Immigration has always been explosive issue for white men re jobs.

Shea: Dialectic of mass movement vs. movement building. Most profound changes are in deepening consciousness.

Billy B: Listen first.

MaxS: We have to inspire our young people, †Let our children know what we're about.

Yvonne: We're creating a legacy for our youth.

Taylor (Max's daughter, 12 years old) Need to listen to young people.

RosaN. Build community on basis of different consciousness, different ways of being.

Invite people into circles where we love ourselves, are honest with ourselves, where we speak of 'I' from our own experiences.

Al H: Create culture of Peace without violence

Mike W: Rethinking paradigms of revolution. Revolutionary work is happening wherever people are transforming.

Will:C There is underground of creativity, resistance, people telling their stories, using energies to build community with one another. Another level of community building in this room.

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Max:S Critical consciousness of young people.Recreate spirit of resistance in community.

Beloved community, collective spirit of Non-V. We can learn from one another.

Somebody nurtured me.

Janice: Thinking about tensions(1) Between Critical connections and critical mass.

(2) Between being hopeful and not so hopeful. (Asthma: Ilana's breathing in and breathing out).

