

MLK AND MOVEMENT BUILDING

By Grace Lee Boggs

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I was not involved in the campaign to make King's birthday a national holiday initiated by Congressman Conyers after his assassination. As a Black Power activist in the 1960s, I identified more with Malcolm than with Martin. I was also concerned that a King holiday would reinforce the tendency to depend on charismatic leaders.

In the last few years, however, as I have been grappling with Detroit's Tsunami, I have learned a lot from King's struggles after the Watts explosion in August 1965 confronted him with the interlocking problems of the urban crisis: our angry and despairing youth, our dying cities, the destruction by Hi-Tech of participation and community. (Malcolm was killed in February 1965, before Watts).

Radical organizers concentrate on mobilizing masses to protest against the system. Their main aim is increasing militancy and numbers.

King understood the almost pathological fear and despair that oppression creates and therefore the need for the oppressed to find creative ways to move beyond fear to hope and beyond despair to transformation.

In recent months I have been exchanging ideas and experiences with John Maguire, a friend of King's since their student days and a 1961 Freedom Rider. Together with Vincent Harding, John prepared the initial draft of King's 1967 anti-Vietnam war speech. I have known Vincent since the 1960s but I met John for the first time last October at the Kalamazoo gathering which decided to issue the **CALL TO THE BELOVED COMMUNITY: THESE ARE THE TIMES TO GROW OUR SOULS**. See the Michigan Citizen, Jan. 9-15, 2005.

Recently John sent me the following Notes on Movement Building. I recommend their careful study and discussion by activists who are beginning to sense that something is "blowing in the wind."

- Suffering and oppression are not enough to create a movement. A movement begins when the oppressed begin seeing themselves not just as victims but as new men and women, pioneers in creating new, more human relations, thus advancing the evolution of the human race.
- Movement builders are able to recognize the humanity in others, including their opponents, and therefore the potential within them for redemption and the possibility of work-through change.
- Movement builders are conscious of the need to go beyond slogans and to create programs of struggle that transform and empower participants.
- At the heart of movement building is the concept of two-sided transformation, both of ourselves and of our institutions.

- Thinking dialectically is pivotal to movement building because it prepares us for the contradictions that inevitably develop in the course of the struggle. A struggle that starts with the need of a particular racial, ethnic or social group only becomes a movement if it creates Hope and the vision of a new society for everyone. But because great hopes can also lead to great disappointments, movement participants must be in touch with elements that sustain them through dark times as well as bright.
- Movement building is intergenerational and involves children and youth—as well as adults—in community building and productive activities.
- Movement building is essentially counter-cultural. It is a struggle to transform ourselves AND social structures, the way we think and act in relationship to one another and with the Earth. Network development, by contrast, is mostly about distributive justice, making demands on the system in order to redistribute the benefits of the society, wages, healthcare, education and the like more equitably. Genuine movement building, in contrast, is about restorative justice, new ways of thinking, and transformation, attempting to advance us another step in our continuing evolution as human beings.