

Ten*

Uncomfortable

Essays

to the
Peace,
Justice,
Environment, Sustainability
and
Global Cooperation
Communities

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All Essays are on the web at
www.outsidethewalls.org/blog
under the search words
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or enter
Uncomfortable Essays
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* - New essays were added, there are now 17, through Jul 10, 2012.

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A Brief Foreword:

The writer of these brief Essays claims no extraordinary expertise.

At the same time, I have the benefit of accumulated experience of 27 years as a teacher's union staff member, where much of my job involved local organizing, seven years as an active participant and sometime leader in the Peace and Justice community of Minneapolis-St. Paul area, and assorted other organizing experiences gained in over 50 years as an adult member of our society.

My experience includes three years (2005-2007) as President of the Minnesota Alliance of Peacemakers www.mapm.org, active involvement in the Peace Island Conference in St. Paul Sep 2-3, 2008, and a large assortment of volunteer roles beginning in college in the 1950s.

Intended audience for these brief writing are leaders and activists in the general area of Peace and Justice, though the writings have universal application to any endeavor which depends on volunteers for its existence. The purpose of the Essays is to make observations that in turn will hopefully cause thought and conversation among the readers. There could be many more essays. I elected to stop at ten.

My ideal for use of these Essays is that they would become part of group dialogues in diverse settings, and perhaps be translated into, at minimum, some experiments in new ways of organizing.

The topics of the Uncomfortable Essays, including the date they were published on the web, is as follows:

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Feedback, including responses, or additions, to these essays is solicited. Interested persons can submit materials for publication as additional Uncomfortable Essays. Check the Website occasionally to see if there are new entries.

SEPTEMBER 12, 2008

Uncomfortable Essay #1 to the Peace and Justice Community: Back to the basics.

I call this, and the next several Venturing entries, "Uncomfortable Essays", since they might seem a bit against the grain of prevailing wisdom. They are observations, not conclusions, and invitations to consideration and discussion within the diverse communities that make up what I call the "Peace and Justice Community".

Below is Essay #1. Essay #2 will be published here about September 30; thereafter every two weeks or so, for an indeterminate time, will come #3, #4 and so on. Reader contributions (guest columns) are solicited for use along the way.

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My most recent blog entry at this space was published eight months ago www.mapm.org/presidentsmemo/2008/02. There is a reason for this. A major conference, Peace Island, caused the investment of a huge amount of time and mental and emotional effort by, at times, nine people. I was one of the nine. The conference, held September 2-3 in St. Paul, appears to have been a success. Over 400 people registered for all or part of the conference, and all had an opportunity to hear a seeming endless parade of highly accomplished speakers and presenters. Peace Island Conference, and Peace Island Picnic the next day, lived up to their names: they were peaceful islands.

The hard work of preparing for Peace Island Conference, plus reflection as I completed three years as President of the Minnesota Alliance of Peacemakers at the end of 2007, have caused me to think of observations I have of the peace and justice movement over the seven years of my active involvement. I come from a career as an organizer (though I never thought of myself as such), and out of this experience I learned some things. It occurs to me that there are some disconnects between current organizing behaviors within this movement that tend to dampen the possibilities of long-term success.

Following is my first observation.

Peace Island was a successful, stand-alone, traditional, conference. It speaks for itself through over 400 people who were there and can tell its story through their own perceptions.

A month earlier, August 1-9, totally separate from Peace Island and the traditional movement leadership, a dozen of us tried an experiment of base-up organizing: "Each

one reach two". The experiment was in complete contrast to the usual ways of contemporary organizing, and it failed for a number of reasons...but its elements, described below, are well grounded and waiting to be tried again in various other settings. Its general methods seem to me to be the key to future success.

"Back to the basics: "Each one reach two": "Going against the grain".

The world in which most of us grew up and live in is hierarchical, with power and control going to those at the top of endless 'pyramids' of almost all organizations, no matter how modest in size, no matter the issue. Somebody always is said to "lead". Also, most of us learn competition from the cradle on. Winners are celebrated. Losers, well.... At the basic level, in events such as Peace Island, participation is voluntary, and passive, and encouraged only to a point: at the event a product is presented for consumption. There is a big payoff to participants -- the 'audience' -- in that they can hold someone else - usually a small group - accountable. They have no ownership beyond the price of admission. There is not even an obligation to attend, much less carry the event back to their own worlds.

On the leader side, moderating the power of being in control of the agenda, there are many downsides. For instance, failure is seen as the leaders fault. If you're reading this, you know of what I speak, probably from experience. You are likely a leader.

Today, also, we live in an environment where the ways of communicating have exploded, while at the same time we can ever more easily isolate ourselves. (Think caller ID, unread e-mails, and on and on and on.) Kids talk in text-message; most people of my generation (I'm 68) are unfamiliar with the mechanics, much less the language of text-messaging. In effect, and in reality, we have more ways to communicate less.

It is this organizers opinion that organizing needs to get back to the bare basics practiced from time immemorial. Here is a simple proposal to be re-perfected by practice: "Each one, reach two".

The concept is simple: say you have a passion, something important to you. Find two, yes, only two, who share your passion; and invite them personally to enroll two people they know, and so on. The first and second steps are crucial. In this model, the next two share responsibility and thus become part owner of the ultimate outcome. Carrying this model forward, thirteen layers out, there would be 4096 enrolled, each who become and can remain part of a simple communications network. No one needs to truly connect with more than two. This way there is much less exhaustion and anger "at the top", and the "top" is more diffuse - leadership is shared. There is less need for fliers, paid ads, raising money...this is very simply person-to-person communications...the most basic of human interactions. Is it easy? No. Messy? Can be, but doesn't have to be.

In "Each one reach two" every person has responsibility as a leader...but only of two.

We need to get back to this and other basics.

The solution? You. Each one reach two. How about you becoming one of those two, practicing and passing on this idea to others?"

A pertinent quotation from Joseph Jaworsky's "Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership" 1996 (still available and a great read)

On Servant Leadership: *"When [Robert K.] Greenleaf wrote Servant Leadership, he "entered" through Hermann Hesse's Journey to the East, an autobiographical account of one man's journey in search of enlightenment. Along the way, the narrator's loyal servant, Leo, sustains him through many trials. Years later, when the man finds the esoteric society he is seeking, he discovers that Leo is its leader --the servant is the leader, and leadership is exercised through service."* Peter Senge in the Introduction to the book.

SEPTEMBER 30, 2008

Uncomfortable Essay #2 - More on "Each One Reach Two"

A week after posting Uncomfortable Essay #1, I was at a meeting and the chair, who had read the Essay, invited me to talk about it with the group of 14 in the circle. I was taken aback by the invitation to, essentially, 'defend my thesis', a 'pop quiz' on my idea! Likely, most of the people had not yet read the piece, and since the time available was short, I did what I could. Perhaps the rest of this essay will fill in some of the blanks I left open at the meeting. But it was very important that the leader encourage the conversation, and ask me to talk further about what I meant about "Each One Reach Two". So, Lowell, I publicly thank you for the uncomfortable opportunity! And I urge many other such conversations.

September 30, 2008, I had my usual bi-weekly coffee with two great friends of long-standing. During our conversation the critical issue of the upcoming election was discussed, and the responsibility we each have to get in contact with others about the importance of casting an informed vote on Nov. 4. It was a "Reach Two" moment, to urge my friends to pass the word to others, and urge their friends to do the same.

Later I did a little calculation. What if my friends got my message to pass the word "to cast an informed vote Nov. 4", and the next day each one of them did reach two more; and the next day each of the four reached two more with the simple message, and so on? What would result?

If by some wild chance this day by day enrollment of "Each One Reach Two" continued, a few days before the end of October 2008, EVERY voting age citizen of the United States would have received the message - well over 200,000,000, All that was necessary was to truly "reach [and enroll] two" of their friends in the task. Just think of the conversations that could begin from that small takeoff point, one reaching two, September 30, 2008.

If this seems impossible, do the math: $2 \times 2 = 4$, $4 \times 2 = 8$, $8 \times 2 = 16$ and so on. Truly great results are possible if people put their passion and their energy to the task.

So, if it is possible to have such outstanding results by simply enrolling two people, why was the initial experiment described in Uncomfortable Essay #1 a failure? (*)

Acknowledging that there are a list of possible reasons why the experiment failed, here are a couple of strong possibilities that are very important, at least from my point of view.

1) Everyone in our experiment group of a dozen August 1-9, 2008 was a 'leader' in his or her own right. But a specific request was made of each of these leaders: that they enroll only two people, not three, not ten...only two. There were no news releases, and only a single quarter sheet flier to be passed personally, hand to hand, to two people. It was an "outside the box" venture for us - something we weren't accustomed to doing. I suppose the idea originated with me, but I can't recall ever having done an activity like this myself. Some organizing rules were changed.

2) Probably even more problematic in this exercise is that the two people each of us were to recruit for the activity were given a responsibility to enroll two others, and to pass along the responsibility to them, in turn, to enroll two more. In the dominant model I have seen in play in our organizations, this delegation of leadership is a strategy that is simply not used. The people recruited to attend events have only a passive role in the success of the activity: they come, or they don't.

It is probably true that it has always been a part of the human condition that few people lead, and the rest follow, and while the followers may grumble, they are inwardly glad that someone has elected to come forward to tell them what to do. This is, unfortunately, a recipe for certain failure. Leaders cannot do it all; leaders are fallible people. Strong leaders can as easily create disasters, as successes.

If my thesis is at all true, "Each One Reach Two" is a manageable and trainable export of leadership skills, and of sharing of responsibility of leadership, and we are missing the boat if we do not at least try to put it into practice.

We could accomplish amazing good November 4 if a few of the roughly 500 people who are learning about this essay this week would actually try Each One Reach Two between now and election day 2008.

In my opinion, the essential future of organizing for success in Peace and Justice and related activities is making owners(leaders) out of our consumers, and thus sharing leadership responsibility much more broadly than is currently the case.

(*) - (NOTE: The August 1-9 activity involved a silent meditation for a two hour time period during open hours at a well known Church. There were no rules for what to meditate about, nor how to go about meditating, nor any risk at all...only to be there for two hours on a single day.)

A side note on what is possible if a committed individual really takes on a task. There are endless similar stories, but read on and be inspired.

A month or so ago, a first-time visitor to <http://www.amillioncopies.info> felt moved to write the following: "You begin your [About A Million Copies] with "A million ordinary women, men, and children in a million places at a million times have made a million differences in their communities and in their world." In March of 1982, my father, a farmer, met with a retired Methodist minister to discuss how they could participate in providing food for starving people around the world. They, along with 20 others, eventually formed the WHET-Force (World Hunger Ecumenical Task Force) and spearheaded a drive to send one million bushels of grain to Poland. Three Iowa Farmers, including my father, and a Catholic Priest, traveled to Poland where they saw long lines of people waiting for small amounts of food due to their severely crippled poultry industry hard hit by Poland's economic conditions at that time. [To make a] Long story--short: There were problems but on February 14, 1983, 5 million pounds of soybean concentrate and 80,000 bushels of corn were shipped to Poland and on May 1, thousands more bushels of corn were sent to get the Polish poultry industry back on its feet. A simple conversation between two people started a mission in another area of the world because somebody cared."

OCTOBER 15, 2008

Uncomfortable Essay #3: Taking a Look at "Power"

"Power" was to be a simple essay, but during the week as I was gathering my thoughts I read a new book [A Persistent Peace by Fr. John Dear] by a well-known peace advocate, and the writing complicated my thinking on the topic. <http://www.loyolapress.com/persistent-peace-by-john-dear-sj.htm>

For this essay, I had in mind a simple recollection of a workshop I had attended over 20 years ago. It was a simple organizing workshop where the organization I was working with was in a minority, but vying to become the majority through a representation election.

The workshop leader that evening was discussing different kinds of power. There are many sources of power, he said. There is the power that comes with authority: for instance, the employer has the right to employ, or to fire, an employee. Or there is the power that comes with access to or control of information: "I know more than you". Dictators are very nervous about an educated populace. There is power that comes with the purse: "I have the money and you don't". And being "father" - is an age-old title conveying power.

Taking the time, the list of power identifiers could be lengthened considerably. Some years ago for instance I recall looking at a large painting of a Danish royal family in the royal palace in Copenhagen, Denmark. Tiny Denmark once was one of the world's most powerful countries. The guide told us that the Danish King had many daughters,

and shrewdly married them off to powerful people in other places, thus accruing power through family relationship.

Back to the long-ago workshop: the speaker came to the final power which, he said, applied most directly to we, who were out of power. It's called referent power. "Referent power"? Think the word "reference". Referent power is what he called the "likeability factor". It is the power of relationships within a community of people, and exercised prudently it transcends all of the other powers.

There aren't many kings in this world. The vast majority of us are ordinary individuals. Powerful people know they are hopelessly outnumbered, and thus need to strategize to keep the rest in their proper submissive place.

Referent power has huge possibilities for the peace and justice community, but only possibility.

The powers flowing from control of money, information, and the like are coveted by the Peace and Justice community, but elusive and very likely largely unattainable: ours are not the constituencies of money, etc. Yet we continue to seek entrees into these areas, and cultivation of our natural base seems to be only a second priority. Part of this is natural: why seek 1000 donors giving \$1 each, when you might find someone who'll give \$1000? It saves a lot of work. But, I ask, what about those 1000 small donors who, once enrolled, could collectively make a huge difference, far in excess of the difference that single \$1000 donor could make by him or her self? (I use money here, only as an example.)

In the seven years I've been around the peace and justice community there has been a huge shift in public attitude towards the never-ending wars which officially began with the bombing of Afghanistan in October, 2001. Back then, according to polls at the time, 94% of Americans generally approved of the violence against Afghanistan. The President had over 90% approval ratings shortly after 9-11.

The latest opinion polls are as close to the reverse of those 2001 figures as it is possible to get. Americans are sick and tired of everything about the wars. They want change. It would seem that referent power, which so championed War in 2001, would now be as vigorously championing peace, and the war would end.

Paradoxically, the violence continues. The visible participation in things like marches seems to have decreased very markedly. Energy has seemingly been replaced with resignation. What has happened? I don't pretend to know. In fact, the answer might be complex. But it seems a bit more than simply a cyclical malaise.

In reading the previously referenced book I found an insight, perhaps unintended by the writer.

The book referenced a substantial list of international 'heavy-hitters' for peace and justice: household names for any of us who act for peace and justice. All were friends of the writer, and seemed to be his mentors and support system. But these personalities came across to me as members of a pretty exclusive and possibly even lonely club, separated from the masses whose cause they so valiantly championed.

They seemed closer to each other than they were inclusive of the necessary 'referent' masses of people who shared their common vision. This wasn't necessarily their doing. They were possibly viewed as a cut above those masses: more gifted in their ability to speak, to write, more courageous or able to sacrifice their all. Perhaps the people who listened so attentively to their talks; or so admired their writing style, or their courageous actions, were disabled by the feeling that they could not possibly make even a small difference as individuals or in small groups.

Very possibly, people do want to be led: to be told what to do. I recall a commentator saying, publicly, at the time of 9-11: "I'd follow a raised donut". He probably meant it.

But if so, that's just one more dilemma to think about: how to construct a movement filled with leaders, rather than dependent on a few high profile ones at local, regional, state or international levels.

Every person can be a leader, and has to be truly empowered and sent forth to take that leadership role, if only with two others.

NOVEMBER 9, 2008

Uncomfortable Essay #4: More Ways to Communicate Less

It is a PROBLEM for the Peace & Justice community these days: Communicating with a broader and new audience is a distinct problem...and this only begins with acknowledgment that the 'mainstream media' seems relatively uninterested in our programs and even our existence. SOLUTION: To address this problem requires open and active discussion of who the unreached audiences are, and genuine openness to tapping alternative ways to reach these audiences.

I try to stay current with communication methods, but I am behind, always, the generation that is my grandkids age. Today is a time of intense change in how people communicate. We do have "more ways to communicate less".

The basics and complexities of contemporary communication intersected for me on a mid-October Monday in St. Paul.

We had just left a political rally whose audience was primarily young adults. At my car, I was confronted by a couple about my age, accusing me of scuffing their bumper (I hadn't). We argued back and forth for awhile, till I took out my camera and took photos of the non-damage. They left.

Except for the photos, the interchange on that St. Paul street could have been seen hundreds of years ago when the only communication was person-to-person. It is only recent in human history that new methods of communicating have been used, and these new means have exploded in recent years.

At the rally I'd just left, one of the speakers made a simple request of the audience: "cell phones up", she said, as she held her cell phone above her head. It seemed like every young person in the field house had their cell phone out, and held it up. The speaker asked them to enter a text message number, and they did.

Me? I have a cell phone, and I had it there. But I have never used the text-message function, and if I did, I'd likely not understand the language. (I'm told that even e-mails are 'in the dust' of the past for many young people these days. They primarily communicate by text message.)

The week prior to the rally, I had helped assemble a traditional paper newsletter, with affixed mailing label, and stamped for U.S. mail. We were mailing the newsletter to people who would answer to the descriptor "senior citizen", and while a significant number of our members have e-mail, nearly as many preferred or expected 'real' mail, and we used the olden days methods we were accustomed to.

(The computer guru for our senior organization says this about our way of communicating: half of our members have told us they have e-mail addresses (others likely do, but don't like to get on e-lists). One-sixth of the e-addresses "*bounce at times*". "*Many entries are several years old*". "*Of these we have no idea how many read our e-mails.*" Of the total database, it appeared that about one-sixth had actually gone to the site to look at the communication. The only way we can communicate is by using varied means of communication. To my knowledge, we don't even use news releases to traditional media.)

Last summer I was the volunteer registrar for the Peace Island Conference, where most of the 400+ registrants were of a generation similar to mine (gray hairs). 90% of the registrants had e-mail addresses; the remaining 10% do not, and most of these have no familiarity with e-mail at all, even at the library. We had to blend the new with the old.

In the just concluded election, YouTube became a major player. Four years ago there was no YouTube. If you grew up in the old days (which can be pretty recent) "What to do?"

We must take a very serious look at how the various audiences we wish to reach receive their information, and then use multiple means to reach the audiences we wish to reach. Best, of course, is person-to-person. But we need alternatives to those we grew up with.

Some years ago I became interested in how people communicate, and the below research based data from 1991 might be helpful to the conversation. The 1991 data was accurate at that point in time, and before. But it is no longer accurate. Still, we seem stuck there (From www.outsidethewalls/outside_archive5.html, idea for Feb 2004, Dick Bernard). Note also that the unranked secondary list that I generated for myself in 2004 is already badly out of date.

Hierarchy of Effective Communications (1991)

1. One-to-one, face-to-face.
2. Small group discussion/meeting
3. Speaking before a large group
4. Phone conversation
5. Hand-written personal note
6. Typewritten, personal letter not generated by computer
7. Computer generated or word-processing-generated "personal" letter
8. Mass-produced, non-personal letter
9. Brochure or pamphlet sent out as a "direct mail" piece
10. Article in organizational newsletter, magazine, tabloid
11. News carried in popular press
12. Advertising in newspapers, radio, tv, mags, posters, etc.
13. Other less effective forms of communications (billboards, skywriters, etc.)

Source: prreporter August 26, 1991 reprinted with permission.

pr reporter: www2.ragan.com/html/main.isx?sub=32

2004 informal list of some other types of communication which are new or have become more common since 1991 (not listed in any order of importance). Which of these, if any, would replace #1 and #2 in the above hierarchy?

E-mail, to a single individual

E-mail, broadcast to a list or group

Web-page

Phone message, to a single individual

Phone message, broadcast

Cassette tape or CD on a specific issue

Individual fax

Broadcast fax

Issue oriented video or DVD delivered to the home

Local public access cable channel program(s)

"Rally at the Capitol" or other similar media and solidarity events Etc.

NOVEMBER 22, 2008

Uncomfortable Essay #5 - The Curse of Cooperation?

Though I had chosen the title of this essay some weeks earlier, this Uncomfortable Essay defined itself in a several hour period on Sunday, November 9, 2008, in Minneapolis MN.

I happen to be Catholic, and regularly attend the 9:30 Mass at Basilica of St. Mary, one of Minneapolis' largest congregations. I quite often usher, and thus am familiar

with the people and routine of this church, which justly prides itself on its commitment to Peace and Justice.

November 9 I was at Basilica as part of the congregation, and noticed at the time of the collection that the ushers were using the “baskets on a stick” which indicated that attendance at the Mass was lower than usual. Evidence of the reason for this came clear at Communion time when a fellow appeared, dressed in a Minnesota Vikings jersey. Aha. There must be a Minnesota Vikings football game in town at noon, I thought. (I don’t follow sports.)

Sure enough, enroute home going east on Interstate #94, there was little traffic with me, but a lot of traffic in-bound to Minneapolis: the Vikings crowd. The Metrodome was being filled to witness modern day gladiators tussle in our present day Coliseum, and the fans were paying big money for the privilege of seeing one team win, hopefully theirs.

About 2:30 the same day, I got back in my car and went back to Minneapolis for a talk by Fr. John Dear, well known for his public anti-war and nonviolence witness. There was little freeway traffic. This one-time only event - Father Dear was on a book tour - had been well publicized. The attendance for the free event, perhaps 200 in all, was good. Father Dear did not disappoint. (His new book “A Persistent Peace” is well worth a read. <http://www.loyolapress.com/persistent-peace-by-john-dear-sj.htm>) While there is no way of quantifying it, there were doubtless many more peacemakers either at the Minneapolis Metrodome, or at home watching the football game on TV, than were listening to the well known advocate for peace and non-violence November 9.

After Father Dear’s talk I got back in the car again, again heading east out of Minneapolis on the same interstate I’d driven a few hours earlier. This time I was part of heavy traffic. The game at the Metrodome was over, and in some of these cars there were happy fans, and in others, downcast fans whose team had lost, the ultimate visible outcome of any competition. (The final score, I noted the next day: Minnesota Vikings 28, Green Bay Packers 27).

Ours is a society that reveres competition. Competition is combat, and we love it. Who wins and who loses is about all that matters. Those most likely to declare competition a virtue are those most likely to have the competitive advantage going in: “winners”. Hubert Humphrey spoke powerfully about the central role of competition as compared to compassion some years ago. His brief commentary can be viewed at www.chez-nous.net/xmas.html. Compassion, which is almost synonymous to cooperation, is, Humphrey made clear, clearly subordinate to competition.

Competitors tend to speak in terms of win or lose, right or wrong, bad or good, true or false: the middle ground nuance is at minimum subordinate. Examples abound. I noted the front page headlines in the Minneapolis Star Tribune Nov. 2-6, all commenting on the elections: “*Fight to the Finish*”; “*neck and neck*”; “*tireless foot soldiers*”; “*holds onto lead*”; “*punishing verbal slugfest*”; “*bitter to the end*”; “*Bitter Senate race...too close to call*”; “*The brawl drags on*”.... Concepts like peace, olive

branch, seem to have no place at the table, at least till there's a winner. Then the 'sides' can posture for a short while about cooperation, consensus or the like, before returning to the battle.

In a few months, the combat event of the American year will ensue, appropriately Roman-numeral identified as Super Bowl XLIII on February 1, 2009, in Tampa FL. That day is a hopeless one for any competing events, much less a peace meeting. Out of Super Bowl XLIII will come one winner and one loser. For a moment, the winner of the Super Bowl will be celebrated; then the winner becomes a target for the next round of win-lose.

But this Uncomfortable Essay is not about Football; rather it is about the "Curse of Cooperation". So, you say, "what's the point?"

If we are to change others behaviors, we need to change our own. We have to model and practice what it is we wish to see in others. But even in the Peace and Justice and related movements, we are set up in teams which compete for scarce resources. As in society at large, the winners - the ones with the most resources - can and do dominate the conversation. They are the ones who decide on the allocation of the available resources.

A year ago I made an effort to both define this problem and suggest solutions as I saw them in my final message as President of the Minnesota Alliance of Peacemakers (MAP), then a group of 73 organizations which operate totally independently of each other and seem, often to be more in competition with each other, than cooperating. Some relevant portions of that letter to those leaders follow.

The solution we need to see within our movement is, I believe, how to elevate true cooperation and consensus building with each other (and others) over the natural tendency we have to compete, and to win. It is a tall order, but a task worth taking on. We simply don't have the resources to waste on competing internally.

From Dick Bernard's letter to leaders of Minnesota Alliance of Peacemakers, December 11, 2007

"...Now, some observations about the MAP community, and some recommendations, as I leave office:

I think activists in the peace and justice movement need to take some serious time to reflect on... issues which offer both potential and peril for our continued health and potential positive impact.

A. Are we a 'coat of many colors', or just a bunch of 'spools of thread'? We are an 'alliance' of independent entities which often seem to value their independence and special interest over the greater common good reflected by the principles of MAP. MAP in 2007 is without much question a known 'player' in the peace and justice and even the greater community, but its current role guarantees it subordinate and only supportive status to its member organizations. Perhaps this is

what is desired by the members, but I think it is something to talk about. MAP can be more than the sum of its parts, if so empowered.

B. Do we dissipate our strength in Competing with each other, over Cooperating?

We are a part of a society which reveres competition, and I think we all tend to operate under those embedded rules of win/lose, even though I think it could be demonstrated that cooperation (sharing) of time/talents/resources would bring benefits to all that far exceed individual wins. We have competing fund-raisers, competing programs, etc. It is not healthy for the individual or for MAP in the long run, I think, and it is a topic worthy of discussion. Think for a moment what our 'world' would be like, if each MAP organization committed 5% of its time/resources to enhance the vitality of MAP and their colleague organizations. The results would be awesome.

C. How about a "Thousand Thousands Initiative"? *Over and over again I've noted that our organizations are, financially, poor in money terms, even though MAPs mission statement and the guiding principles we share likely reflect the sentiment of most citizens in our area, country and world. We work for positive future-oriented things but we're constrained by that old ogre, money.*

It is not possible to get involved in everything. At a personal level, if I were to contribute only \$25 to each MAP member organization, that would now amount to nearly \$2,000 a year.

In recent months I have been wondering what would happen IF we could find 1,000 individuals and/or groups and/or groups of individuals (i.e. 100 giving \$10 each) who would be willing to pool \$1,000 of their non-tax deductible dollars to be placed in a single fund to help finance things like commercial media ads, etc. Of course, 1,000 1,000s equals \$1,000,000 - very serious money. I can think, probably, of almost all the objections people might have to this idea (who would control this money? etc., etc., etc.) But consider this: \$1,000,000 amounts to only 33 cents per resident in this metropolitan area of 3,000,000 population, 1,000 contributors are really a small number given our population, and certainly this would be an attainable goal IF we had the will."

I'll leave the last word to Hubert Humphrey and his visitors, in the piece referenced earlier in this essay www.chez-nous.net/xmas.html .

DECEMBER 8, 2008

Uncomfortable Essay #6: Money: Time to shift a paradigm.

In some ways, this essay is the most difficult to commit to paper. It is most uncomfortable. But I feel it is something that needs to be laid on the table for conversation.

One of many axioms I grew up with was “*money is the root of all evil*”. I’m not sure why it was part of my learning. Perhaps it was because we had little, and it was foolish to get ideas about prosperity. Wanting money was almost a negative value. Sometimes I think that the entire Peace and Justice community has internalized the same lesson. But seeming near-antipathy towards money, and near-reverence for selfless volunteerism is not helpful to promote our short or long term success.

Examples of the problem abound.

Within days of publishing Uncomfortable Essay #5, a friend wrote in behalf of a mutual friend, an activist who was interested in developing a website. I referred the friend to someone whose business is websites, who is very reliable, and who I know has reasonable rates. The two made contact: the rates were too high. The effort, then, has become finding someone who would do the website for nothing: a volunteer. The friend of a friend is himself an addictive volunteer and activist, and (almost cause and effect) also chronically short of money to spend paying for necessary things like a website for his organization.

My friend and I conversed a bit about the dilemma of “starving artists”. My friend, also an artist, “*agreed completely*” with me: willing volunteers with talent are exploited. If you want to eat, look for work in fields other than Peace and Justice and the like. The Peace and Justice business seems restricted to people who have both the time to do the work required and the personal resources to not need monetary compensation. Paradoxically we thus seem to restrict opportunities for great numbers of younger people we need who love what we advocate, and would be very good at it for the long term, but cannot afford to be involved with us. Very simply, they need to eat.

Our recently concluded Peace Island Conference (September 2-3) provides a rather large example of the problem. (I use Peace Island as an illustration, not as a personal complaint. I was a willing volunteer with Peace Island.)

For all intents and purposes, seven volunteers put on the Peace Island Conference. All but one of us were retired. To pull off the conference we, very conservatively, collectively contributed over 2000 hours of unpaid labor over nearly two years, and that was just actual time at meetings, and didn’t count things like driving to and from the meetings, or individual work at home. As I write, December 7, 2008, at least one of the volunteers is still very actively engaged in finishing work on the DVDs which are the record of the conference. To “pay” we volunteers even minimum wage and

minimal mileage for use of our cars, would have required us to greatly increase the budget...and tuition. In fact, we didn't even reflect our 'cost' in our budget. It's an invisible number.

We planned to pay our speakers, but the group of 23 outstanding speakers we engaged for the conference were aware, up front, that we couldn't assure any of them any payment for their services, though they were the attraction for the conference - the reason people came. They were agreeing to donate their time, in effect.

After considerable debate, and more than a little angst, we decided to charge \$50 tuition for the two day conference.

An e-mail received the week prior to the conference, from an activist who also registered and attended the conference, helps define our dilemma, and that of the movement generally: *"I realize that Peace Island is a bargain given the many speakers, etc. but I personally cannot remember when [we] have paid \$100 for us both to go to any event, conference, concert, etc. Of course, we don't even go to the [neighborhood movie] theatre as much any more since they raised their rates from \$1 to \$1.50 on Tuesdays! With my primary involvement in a group that has no dues, never charges admission, and can't even afford to belong to MAP [\$50 annual dues] I had to gulp when you said [in an earlier e-mail] "because we are priced so low". We are securely "middle class" and yet \$50 is still a lot of money to us: I can't imagine how high \$50 must be to the many who are far less well off than we. I hope we will fill the seats...for free or with a free will donation...if there are empty seats near starting time. Above all, the speakers need to be heard."*

(NOTE: We were anything but rigid about filling the seats, Very few requested scholarships, and we accommodated them all.)

After we paid our bills for Peace Island, we reported that we had essentially broke even on a budget that ultimately came to over \$30,000; we were able to pay our speakers small honorariums within our most optimistic budget, as we had hoped. We paid for the space we used; for printing, postage, refreshment, web design and maintenance, videography, transportation for speakers, etc. But our budget included no money whatsoever for any other "internal" personnel costs, as well as for the people who helped with registration, etc. and as a result missed all or part of the programs they had paid to experience.

The solution to the problem of money is easy: to acknowledge that we need it. But it is made more difficult in that our conservatism on the issue of money is apparently very deeply engrained. Further, our many organizations compete with each other for scarce resources (which will likely become even scarcer in these harsh times.)

We need to be willing to talk about the problem openly, and to consider some options along the lines expressed at the end of Essay #5, above. Otherwise our movement will reach an internal crisis point. To paraphrase a story told by Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) President Jim Harkness as part of his keynote at Peace Island about the aging of our nations farmers (*"the average age is 55, and at*

this rate in 20 years there will be no more farmers”); in our case, in 20 years, all our reliable current volunteers will be, shall we say, unavailable. The outlook for recruiting a new generation of farmers is probably better than for creating a new generation of unpaid volunteers in our movement: at least farming offers the prospect of a livelihood, at least a garden and something to eat!

Failing to address this problem of money will defeat our very purpose, which is to advance public awareness and support of our goals. And young people, who we need to have involved, and who will be looking for work in increasingly large numbers during these grim economic times, will not be able to afford to spend time working with us, even if our advocacy is to help assure their own future. We should consider employing some of them for living wages.

We need to talk about this, openly and honestly, and propose alternatives to the status quo.

DECEMBER 22, 2008

Uncomfortable Essay #7: “Overcoming the Fear of Success.”

Years ago I came across a magazine article with the intriguing title “Overcoming the Fear of Success”. I have always remembered the article, though I couldn’t tell you in what magazine I saw it, nor the year it was published.

The essential message was to women: unless you are very lucky, you were taught from birth to fill a certain role. Until fairly recent history, the standard roles would be marriage, secretarial, nursing, teaching and such. Women who aspired to break out of these roles often had to break the family rules which were so engrained that if the person wanted to become, say, a banker or similar role traditionally reserved to a man, she might unconsciously do things to sabotage her own success. The family rule could be brutal: “who does she think she is?” It was easier to conform. By giving up her goal, she fit into the family system more comfortably.

At about the same time period in history I was representing employees in a union setting where there were two competing unions, only one of which could possess the rights to represent all of the employees in a particular bargaining unit. The Law had a provision where bargaining rights of one union could be challenged by a competitor every two years. All that the competitor needed was a 30% showing of interest from members. Sometimes I worked with a majority union, sometimes with a minority union. Always, relations between the leaders of the two unions were at best tense, often non-existent, even in tiny units. This biennial warfare went on for over 15 years until the two competing unions finally merged at the state level.

I noticed at the time that the closer the ‘out’ organization leaders came to the possibility of success, the more likely it was that they would do something to sabotage their probability of succeeding: slacking effort; internal squabbles, and the like. It

was as if they feared the very thing they had fought so hard to achieve: the right to represent everybody.

At one point towards the end of the competition phase I was working with a fairly large minority union with several hundred members whose leaders really despised the leadership of the other organization, and badly wanted to take away bargaining rights from them. But I started noticing something that I could recall noticing in other similar settings before, but hadn't really paid much attention to: the out of power organization really seemed to not want to be in power. The closer the union came to the possibility of success, the more its leaders and other more active members held back and even sabotaged their own campaign in assorted small ways.

I came to conclude that it made no difference on which 'side' the minority happened to be: in a real sense they liked being in the minority, since they knew the rules and roles of being out of power. Being in power was an unfamiliar role. It was easier to be against the incumbent, than to be responsible for outcomes.

Sometimes in our own movement I sense the same kind of self-sabotage. It takes place in many ways and on many levels, but the essential is always the same: being the outsider seems preferable to being the one in charge. After all, the one in charge is accountable; the outsider possesses the right to complain without consequence.

Perhaps we should consider the possibility that we, collectively, fear success.

There are endless ways that we do this, beginning with isolating ourselves within our own particular passion, associating only with 'birds of a feather', and in many ways denying there are other legitimate points of view with which we might negotiate; minds to be changed by direct interaction.

Perhaps I'm wrong on this, though I doubt it. Talking this issue through, however, would be a solution in and of itself.

DECEMBER 25, 2008

Uncomfortable Essay #8: Grappling with "Truth"

This is the only Uncomfortable Essay to be published on a specific day: Christmas Day, December 25, 2008. If there is any other day in our calendar where there are as many, and as intense, interpretations of the real meaning of the day or the "Truth" therein, I'd be surprised. While there may seem to be a majority opinion on what Christmas is supposed to mean, and while there might be many areas of consensus about the general meaning of Christmas in our society, "Truth" is very much in the mind of the beholder. "Truth" is as elusive as it is portrayed to be certain.

So, how is "the Truth" of Christmas defined? "Let me count the ways". Even the assorted Christian Bible study groups I see from time to time at my coffee shop, all having earnest conversations about the meaning of this or that text, may not be able to agree with each other on the fine points of interpretation about the day.

Occasionally I listen to a popular “light rock” radio station that bills itself as the most popular commercial station in this metropolitan area, and which goes to a 100% Christmas music format beginning even before Thanksgiving. Today, Christmas Day, as they’ve been saying all month, will be “commercial free”. Of course, today follows a full month of commercial laden programming. Many of the Christmas songs are in themselves commercials to spend money on Christmas presents. The week prior to Christmas, one of the big advertisers is a religious denomination, marketing its schools through its local spokesperson. And as everyone knows, the biggest single commercial block of the entire year is what is called “Christmas Shopping”; and Christmas time is a time relied on by churches and other causes for major additional (and tax deductible) money contributions.

So, what is “the Truth” of Christmas? It depends. And, of course, the issue of “truth” is much broader than simply considering the single issue, Christmas.

This fall I offered to a local organization a recently produced film questioning the official story about one of our national tragedies. I sent the film for preview to the local President. I thought it would be a good film to view and discuss at a membership meeting. In addition, I could supply the person who made the film, a college teacher, to engage in dialogue or even debate with our group.

A couple of weeks later the DVD came back with an attached post-it note. *“Dick - I believe that showing this DVD to our members would be counter productive to my efforts to grow [the organization], and I believe that you realize that based on the dialog you’ve had with several of our [fellow] members.”* (There had been an interchange between members, but by no means could the argument be considered a “dialog”.)

Subsequent I was at a showing of the film in a context similar to the local group just mentioned. It was a rich, respectful evening. People came with an open mind, offered their opinions and listened to other points of view. A month or so later, I heard a similar report about another showing of the film.

Several years earlier I had lobbied the leader of a well known peace group to show a recently released documentary film called “Peace One Day”, a documentary about a huge accomplishment by a single young Englishman, who convinced the United Nations General Assembly to adopt September 21 each year as the International Day of Peace. www.peaceday.org. It was a truly huge accomplishment. After a while, the terse response came back from the peacemaker about the film: not interested. The film was not hard-edged enough against war, too soft. So the film went un-shown, at least in her group.

I wasn’t surprised at the first leader response, since he spoke as it was with some of his other members: they would likely be very angry to have any of their own biases questioned in the least. They believed what they believed, and weren’t to be bothered with alternative interpretations.

I was surprised at the response of the Peace leader rejection of the Peace film some years earlier. After all, what I proposed was totally in synch with the mission of her group.

Succinctly, our movement is subject to the same kinds of communication problems as any other. We can get mired in the certainty of our “truth”, whatever it is.

This past October one of my ideological allies wrote that we collectively seem unwilling to engage in debate, and that the public interest in the presidential candidate debates then occurring was proof positive that the public has a hunger for open and substantive face-to-face discussions of issues. My correspondent had noted a posting of mine where I recalled reviewing a diary of a 1927 Debate tour of 31 Midwest and west coast colleges and universities. The tour pitted three young Englishmen against local debaters at each campus. The debates, as reported by one of the Englishmen in his most interesting diary, attracted large crowds, and enthusiastic responses at every campus. The 1927 spectators apparently appreciated well reasoned debate.

It is an unfortunate consequence of today’s lifestyle, with its easy anonymity and sophisticated communications networking, that groups of individuals can band together and communicate solely with people who share their particular passion, their particular version of the “truth”. Other points of view can be disappeared, though that doesn’t mean that those alternate points of view cease to exist. Sooner or later the alternate truths bubble to the surface, with consequences.

Unfortunately, there are many ways to view a “truth”. And I think the Peace and Justice movement would be very well served to seek out and encourage all manner of discussion and debate about all of the issues about which we hold strong opinions. It would seem worthwhile to have true interaction with others of differing point of view. If we took more of this kind of risk, it would seem to me, the odds would seem better for us to actually resolve issues, rather than to stay in opposing “armed camps” permanently stale-mated, or doomed to “win-lose” relationships.

I have long been taken with a quotation I saw in Joseph Jaworsky’s book, “Synchronicity, the Inner Path of Leadership” (1996). Preceding the chapter on “Dialogue: The Power of Collective Thinking”, Jaworsky included the following quote from David Bohms “On Dialogue”. It speaks to this business of talking with, rather than talking to or at others:

“From time to time, (the) tribe (gathered) in a circle.

They just talked and talked and talked, apparently to no purpose. They made no decisions. There was no leader. And everybody could participate.

There may have been wise men or wise women who were listened to a bit more - the older ones - but everybody could talk. The meeting went on, until it finally seemed to stop for no reason at all and the group dispersed. Yet after that, everybody seemed to know what to do, because they understood each other so well. Then they could get together in smaller groups and do something or decide things.”

Even within our own settings, within the motley crews which are our own “tribes” (family, neighborhood, etc) this business of just talking and talking and talking can be a very good thing....

PS: Ironically, during this 2008 Christmas Day, two individuals e-mailed me with varying accounts of the famous Christmas Day Truce in the trenches of WWI in Europe. If parties intent on physically killing each other could call a truce for one day, why shouldn't we be willing to listen respectfully to other points of view - or at least make such an overture? Some references on the Christmas Day Truce are at

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_truce;

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9coPzDx6tA&feature=related>

DECEMBER 29, 2008

Uncomfortable Essay #9: Death

Back in 1980, I saw an announcement about a concert of ethnic music, showcasing my own French-Canadian culture. I went to the concert, and decided to become involved in the organization, La Societe Canadienne-Francaise du Minnesota, which at the time had been formally in existence for less than two years, though its elements came into existence during the bicentennial year of 1976.

(I was 40 years old, then, and only a short time before had I become interested in my ethnic heritage.)

The organization was a vibrant bunch, with regular and active meetings and a newsletter. It was led by a very charismatic and passionate leader, a retired man about my present age, who had an immense amount of energy and talent as well. The organization had plenty of other talented sub-leaders. Two of them were pioneers on the twin cities public access radio station, KFAI. Their program focused on French and French-Canadian music.

As my engagement increased I volunteered to do the newsletter for the group, and I really enjoyed the task. While it was work, I learned a great deal I had never known about my own heritage.

The years went on, and slowly, and at first imperceptibly, things began to change. Somebody moved away; somebody else died; somebody quit because they were angry at someone else. All of these reasons, and others, are normal reasons for attrition in any organizations life. Members communicated by U.S. mail and telephone. E-mail came very late to us, largely because most of us had no familiarity with e-mail even after it became common.

The big problem for our group, and it became a very serious and ultimately fatal problem, was that the working (leader) base of the organization got smaller and smaller as people got older and older. We needed to recruit new and active members to refresh our leadership base, but new members took a lot of effort to find. Young

people, for various reasons, had less interest in an ethnic heritage organization than we did.

Things both reached a zenith and a nadir for us at about the same time, in the spring of 1999. We had a gala celebration on the 20th anniversary of our history, actually got a nice financial grant from a Foundation to help with expenses, had a very large attendance, and everyone had a great time.

But most of the celebrants that night were simply consumers of the effort, and not contributors to it. Afterwards those few of us who remained active had less and less success marshalling support for anything related to the organization.

The daughter of a founding member did have an interest, and became President at about the same time she became a new Mom. Life interfered with her activity with our club. She wasn't around very long.

In January of 2002, I put out the 128th and final issue of our newsletter, and in effect 'turned off the lights, and locked the door' on a nearly 23 year history. I'm sure that among the subscribers who received that last newsletter there was sadness at our demise. But no one came forward to resurrect us.

These days it is only at an occasional funeral that I see dwindling evidence of our once vibrant past. Our charismatic founder died in 2005 at the age of 94.

I wonder, sometimes, if we could have re-invented ourselves. We celebrated a single nationality group with a distinct language and culture which was disappearing. Unlike we older-timers, few of our kids had little actual proximity to this culture. But we really didn't pay attention to the re-invention process either. We are now just another historical archive entry at the Minnesota Historical Society and University of North Dakota Library.

Many small organizations I see today have similar problems to the one I just described. We are getting older, and we have not really come to grips with the absolute need to turn over the future to the youngsters. Our young people are more difficult to connect with. Life is complex, and kids communicate with different means than we elders are accustomed to. And it is difficult I would guess, for young people to feel very hopeful in 2009, particularly in an economic sense. There are lots of reasons for a present disconnect. But these reasons ultimately could turn out to be our individual and collective demise.

Our present day organizations also have a major difference from the French-Canadian club I describe. La Societe celebrated the past; while the Peace and Justice and allied communities advocate for the future which will directly impact on every one of our children and grandchildren and their cohort everywhere. Assorted documents can help bring to life the old ethnic culture for the presently disinterested youngsters; but we all have to work together to secure the future of the following generations, and it is the young people who need to take charge, sooner than later.

At the beginning of this Essay, I mentioned that I didn't get interested in my heritage until I was 40. I said that as a specific reminder to myself. Because young people

aren't engaged now, doesn't mean they won't become engaged. But something has to be found to attract their attention, and that something exists in a multitude of forms. We just need to keep looking for the keys to make the connection, one or two people at a time.

We also need to talk very seriously about how to make a complete transition to a new generation of activists. This won't be easy. But if we don't find a way to cross this chasm, more of us will begin to "turn out the lights and lock the doors" at the very time we most need to be vibrant, alive and active.

DECEMBER 31, 2008

Uncomfortable Essay #10: Life

Looking back, I can trace the genesis of these Uncomfortable Essays to early 2007.

I decided to call these "Uncomfortable Essays" because they were (and are) uncomfortable for me to write. I am reporting on observations I have made which can easily be construed to be critical of the very movement of which I am an active part. Publishing thoughts like these carries at least a small risk. One doesn't know how they will be received. They might, after all, be considered to be wrong! In fact, they may well be wrong; they are simply my impressions.

I am relatively new to the peace and justice movement - becoming part of it after the bombing of Afghanistan began in October, 2001. I could see no good coming out of that warfare, which was supported by 94% of Americans at the time. It was a very lonely time. Only one of twenty of my fellow citizens agreed with me.

Since 2001 I have tried to participate in many of the significant events, met a lot of the leaders, did a little leading myself, and learned a great deal, including about the movement itself and the people active in it.

Even before 2007 I was noticing that the assorted protests and actions and even talks were drawing fewer people, even though public disapproval of the wars was increasing. In short, there seemed a paradoxical shift: rather than a positive correlation between public attitude and response in support of public actions, the correlation seemed more negative. People were tired of the war, but were less actively engaged - or so it seemed - in the traditional modes of protest and action. More people seemed to become "passive-ists" when more activists were needed.

But we seemed to keep doing the same things in the same ways, including simply re-doing what used to work. Succinctly, the tendency in the first decade of the 21st century was to replay the 1960s, but the 2000s are not the 1960s.

There are likely dissenting views about the current health of advocacy for peace, justice, the environment and global cooperation. For instance, earlier this year Frida Berrigan published a piece in *Common Dreams* entitled "*Dismantling Peace Movement Myths*" www.commondreams.org/archive/2008/05/07/8793. (Her "Four Myths" did

not enter into my own writing, but are relevant as yet another reference for discussion.)

The sole purpose of these pieces is to encourage discussion and change.

As I began the process of these essays, I came to a conclusion that however many topics I might wish to write about, I would conclude the series at ten. I know there are more topics to address.

When I reached the time where I was thinking about this final offering, I decided to make it a summary document from which I would share some recommendations for hoped-for 'solutions driven' conversations.

I also decided to open this column to signed commentaries from readers reflecting on, or agreeing or disagreeing with, the substance of these essays, or offering thoughts on new topics. In other words, this space is now open to you. Make submissions to dick_bernard at MSN.com.

As to recommendations, I am simply going to leave it at this: the subject headings for the 10 brief essays are the summary of the commentaries. I would hope that these few pages will inspire dialogue, perhaps some change, and great future success in sundry ways.

We have to look seriously at the dilemma of organizing, generally, in today's individualistic nation. There are tens of thousands, probably millions, of "right" ways to advocate for anything. It is easiest to hold on to what we have always done and in the process miss some new and important ways of doing things. People who were young adults in the 1960s come from a time when joining groups was common and important. Today, we seem to live in a time where people are reluctant to become parts of groups, even those whose philosophy they agree with. Perhaps this individualism will change in harsher times, but not yet.

The dilemma, it seems to me, is re-organizing organizing in such a way that those millions of ideas, and those individuals who are "Armies of One", can actually accomplish things together. This is not easy, particularly in this time in history when individualism still trumps being part of a group. When even the U.S. Army, no model of individualism, adopts as its recruiting theme "An Army of One" to attract recruits, as it did from 2001-2006, you know you have an organizing problem.

Absolutely essential, in my opinion, is discussion of bridging the gap between elder and youth. Another essential, it seems to me, is the matter of general attitude. There often seems an aura of hopelessness in our conversations, even in this time where hope should be at least a possibility.

At this point in history, we have plenty of knowledge of the problems; it is of limited value to continue to complain about what is wrong; we need to be about advocating for what has to be in the many ways that are available to us. We need to work outside of our comfortable cohort, both inside and particularly outside the movement of which we are a part. We need to attempt to find common ground including with those for whom there seems no possible common ground.

We need to work very, very hard at the business of inclusion, collaboration, communication and relationships. All of these are essential, especially within our own circles.

We need to experiment with new approaches.

I deeply appreciate your taking the time to read these imperfect thoughts. I hope they generate a spark or two in the coming months.

Have a happy and productive New Year in 2009.

I leave the last word to counselor Earnie Larson, who left me and others in a 1982 seminar with a powerful thought about change. *“Nothing Changes if Nothing Changes”*, he said.

Dick Bernard

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ADDITIONAL ESSAYS FOLLOW.

MARCH 9, 2009

Uncomfortable Essay #11: Making the “Challenge of Change” into “Change we can believe in”.

(Uncomfortable Essays #1-10 can be accessed beginning at <http://www.mapm.org/presidentmemo/2008/09/>. You can easily sign up for RSS feed of this occasional blog (usually about once a month or so. Instructions at right on this page.)

“Change is inevitable, but growth is optional.” Michael Fullan

January 9, 2009, I clicked “publish” on Essay #10 in this series. Eleven days later, President Barack Obama was sworn into office, bringing a promise of ***“Change we can believe in.”*** Six weeks after Inauguration Day polls show that the American public is united (almost 3-1) with the President on his plans to attack the daunting menu of dilemmas which greeted him on his first day in office. The opposition with its more than ample megaphone is attempting to stymie his efforts, or at minimum, to make all efforts appear like failures, and to replace hope with fear of change.

Some of the people who helped elect President Obama are already disappointed that he seems not to be addressing their particular issue, or not addressing it aggressively enough. “He’s selling us out”, some already suggest.

Welcome to the most powerful, daunting and thankless job in the world: President of the United States.

“What gives me hope? As long as your hope is committed in action, then hope is alive in the world.”

Julia Butterfly Hill

*

What’s past has always helped give me context. Back in the 1990s, I attended a stimulating series of annual conferences put on by a major national organization for which I was then a staff member.

The conferences were titled “Challenge of Change”, and staff people and leaders came from around the country to participate. We were in a pleasant resort setting. There were stellar speakers and workshops, all built around the theme of Change. The Conference was in March, too cool to golf, and sometimes snowy (perhaps the better to keep our focus on the reason we were at the Resort Center in the first place.)

After the conference, we went home to our respective states, all charged up. It wasn’t long, though, when the dreaded status quo took hold, perhaps even before we’d cleared the hotel checkout. Even the well intentioned found a back home crowd who hadn’t been there, and may even have resented their colleagues ‘junket’.

The Challenge of Change is an immense one, whether talking about an individual project to, for example, lose weight; or helping bring deep and meaningful change to an organization, regardless how large or small that organization might happen to be.

And now we have a new President elected and inaugurated and committed to change a system of over 300,000,000 people, organized into many states, part of a large and complex world.

Barack Obama needs our help, one action at a time, here, now. This goes as well for our Senators, Congresspeople and other lawmakers who share all or some of our values. If we could mentally divide the huge population pie called the United States into a manageable slice, say helping two more people get engaged, and encouraging them to do the same for two more, we could “get ‘er done”. But will we?

Jermitt Krage, who spent an entire career as an organizer, and continues to be a leader in retirement says this: ***“Sustaining engagement is critical. Support from others is a strong, necessary motivator.”*** Be critical, yes, but back the criticism with very affirmative supportive action. People who represent you need to know they’re not alone.

*

There are books written about change, and consultants who make very large fees consulting about change. For whatever it is worth, here are a few thoughts I had around the “turn of the century” in 2001 on why change is so difficult to effect. (The article, with graphic, is accessible at January, 2002, http://www.outsidethewalls.org/outside_archive1.html .)

“The reality is simple: CHANGE is TOUGH and SLOW, and consequently, most often AVOIDED. FEAR is a factor (as in “cold sweat”).

Almost always, in change, things seem to - and often do - get worse before they get better. You know why this is, from personal changes you’ve wished to make in your own life. Indeed, the challenge of change seems parallel to the famous Stages of Grief identified by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. First, there is DENIAL AND ISOLATION (“we’re okay”); then ANGER (“kill the messenger who carries the bad news”); then BARGAINING, DEPRESSION, and finally, ACCEPTANCE.

A reasonable schematic about the dilemma of the process of change is illustrated [at the above website]. The [straight] red line indicates the status quo - [the steady state], the comfort zone for most of us in most of our lives. We stay with the familiar, whether that is good or bad. The green [ascending] line symbolizes something better if we change; but the inevitable[initial] dip, symbolized in yellow, often sabotages our best efforts - and we quit before the good change can kick in.”

Unfortunate but true, almost always there is an “inevitable dip” as change begins that is the killer in most change efforts. Ask anyone who’s trying to replace a bad habit with a better one. Before it gets better, it gets worse...the temptation is to quit: end of effort, back to the less desirable status quo.

Unfortunately, also, ACCEPTANCE is often a last minute acknowledgement after all else has failed, and there is truly no remaining hope. In this case, we get around to accepting our own responsibility to be cause in the matter of change when it is too late. Losing hope could happen to Obama himself. Another long-time organizer, Bob Barkley, says ***“this factor may well happen to Obama himself as well as to the rest of us.”*** We need to change our own attitudes, acting early and constantly towards the possibility of positive change, and in the process raise up the President in his administrations efforts.

Again, as Michael Fullan said ***“Change is inevitable, but growth is optional.”*** According to Barkley, ***“the point is that change is going to happen in spite of us, but if it happens because of us, it would be nice if it could be called progress.”***

*

The question becomes, what are we going to do to make ***“Change we can believe in”*** meaningful? It is impossible, after all, for a single person, the President, to effect the change. He can make change possible, but our “boots on the ground” are what will make the difference.

A big temptation will be to revert to old behaviors: “I’ll start tomorrow...or next week”; “I need to read one more book, go to one more speech - then I’ll know enough”.... We all have our favorite dodge. As one who’s “been there, done that”,

there are no excuses. None of us have to leave town or impact on thousands to make Change real. We just need to have the will to do so with a few.

We need to be up to the task. Without us, positive change won't happen.

*

Leaving an inspirational talk by Green Economy leader Van Jones on March 5, we were each given a business card sized piece of paper on which three quotations were printed. These quotations seem to be a fitting call to action for us all, to make positive change happen in our families, communities, states, nations and world. The first, from Julia Butterfly Hill is near the beginning of this essay.

The others:

"I think the most hopeful thing that I can point out to you is look to your left and look to your right. Look at the beautiful people who are around you right now...We don't need any hero on a white horse. We are the people we've been waiting for. You already have within you enough love to save the planet."

Van Jones

"Every single one of us can do something to make a difference. You can. You can. You can. I can. God bless you."

Bishop Desmond Tutu

The change curve applies to every one of us who, in one way or another, supported then-candidate Obama's *"Change we can believe in."*

Let's disprove Pogo's famous quotation *"We have met the enemy...and he is us"*.
http://www.igopogo.com/we_have_met.htm

Go forth.

Among an endless array of resources, check these: www.VanJones.net,
www.GreenForAll.org, www.EarthCouncils.org

MARCH 21, 2009

Uncomfortable Essay #12: Revisiting the "Proles" and George Orwell's 1984

I will click "publish" on this Essay, and then travel to the demonstration marking the 6th anniversary of the tragic and destructive War on Iraq - a war that has helped destroy both our national reputation and our economy. The demonstration is good;

what is far more important is what is done by every individual after the demonstration becomes a memory.

The Tuesday, March 17, 2009, Minneapolis Star Tribune carried a column of mine, "Passive Actors in our own destruction". A primary emphasis was recalling George Orwell's 1984. The first response came from Will, who asked: " My only question to you, Dick, is this: please tell me how the Proles are going to overthrow the establishment." (The complete column follows this essay.)

I don't know why the STrib decided to print my piece. Whatever, the fact of the matter is that for a short while this week, 350,000 people of all ideologic stripes, and many more on-line around the world, had a chance to consider my thoughts, front and center in the best spot on a major newspapers opinion page. At minimum, my guess is that there will be a little uptick in interest in "1984". There were perhaps a dozen pieces of direct feedback to me about the column - from my experience after other columns that is a heavy response. The response was positive. There were no brickbats.

But I have noticed something as this week ends: the recognized leaders of the organizations that are my natural allies, peace and justice (P&J) folks, did not comment to me about the column; neither did the column become a link on progressive websites.

Why? I don't know. Maybe.... More in a moment.

To Will, I responded that "Overthrow" never entered my mind. If anything, I was "equal opportunity angry" at our entire system, including the present day Proles who are all of us and who have in many ways been "partners in the crime", accepting the unacceptable, playing small rather than large. Reflecting back on 1984 while writing the column, I didn't see the Proles as innocent victim of Big Brother; rather they had created the monster they now felt powerless to destroy. That's an uncomfortable indictment...of us, in 2009. Maybe that's why there was no response.

Orwell was an astute observer of the human political condition, and he observed that the vast majority of humanity - the Proles -were willing to let things happen to them, even beyond the point of no return. At the very end of 1984, the last four words, actually, the decision of the main character, Winston, is revealed. (You need to pick up the book to learn what he decided.)

We Proles of today need to play more of an active role to help modify our severely damaged system in whatever ways we can. We have huge power as individuals and small groups, but only if we exercise it (which is hard work). Today's demo, like all demos, is only a small down-payment on the effort we need to expend to truly make the change that is necessary in this country.

In all of these Essays, I've tried to be mindful of Solutions: what is being/can be done.

Thursday, March 19, at the annual conference of the Alliance for Sustainability www.afors.org, I absorbed some more hope for our future, including:

1) Singer Mari Harris who inspired, as she always does.

<http://urbznet.com/mariharris>

2) In an afternoon workshop on Transit and the Land Use Connection, John Bailey of 1000 Friends of MN, and Michelle Dibble, of TLC, demonstrated by their presence and their knowledge that younger activists are out there, and there exists a great and knowledgeable infrastructure for promoting progress in all areas about which we are concerned. All we need to do is to look them up.

(<http://www.tlcminnesota.org/index.php>; <http://www.1000fom.org/>, and endless others.)

3) And Ken Melamed, Mayor of Whistler, BC, a town of 9500 which is hosting the 2010 Winter Olympics, gave great insights into the power of an engaged citizenry to embark on a process of building and maintaining sustainability, town by town. Of the many pieces of wisdom he offered, this one stuck in my notes: "change has to come from the grassroots level". That's us, folks. www.whistler2020.ca for more about Whistler's planning process.

Together, in small and large groups, and yes, individually too, we can get the job done!

Now, if the Alliance of Peacemakers and the Alliance for Sustainability could truly collaborate....

*

POSTSCRIPT June 21, 2009

According to news accounts, there were 350 involved in the March 20 march and demonstration referred to at the beginning of this Essay. I was in the march. The weather was perhaps the most ideal one can experience for this date in Minnesota. The attendance was the lowest ever. I have been part of each since 2003. Three weeks later, protesting "taxpayers" gathered at the same location on April 15. Theirs was a nationally organized initiative. The Minneapolis Star Tribune estimated the taxpayer crowd at about 2,000; the St. Paul Pioneer Press estimated about 1,000

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Published in Minneapolis Star Tribune Tuesday, March 17, 2009

"Passive Actors in our own destruction" by Dick Bernard.

"The Star Tribune main headline (3/15) was "After Bailout, \$100 M in Bonuses" to "executives in the unit that brought AIG to its knees". AIG states it is "contractually obligated to pay them".

I know only what I read in the papers and on the internet and see on TV. I also worked directly with contracts, full-time, for 27 years, and it would be hypocritical to defend some contracts and reject others. Contracts are contracts.

In this case, most likely, everything was completely "legal": the Congress and the Presidency were bought and paid for by these same institutions that have now wreaked havoc on the world economy. A friend puts it best: the trickle down pipes are clogged.

It's time for the slow, agonizing correction.

The reality on how our economic crisis will play out is that nobody knows, not the experts, not the person in the street. Nobody knows what the short and long term implications are, including those in high level positions. If the geniuses of Capitalism, in executive offices and board rooms and business schools, were as smart as they portray themselves to be, they wouldn't have structured this "house of cards" to fall on top of them.

In a sense, we are all idiots, grasping at straws. We just don't know, except that the future news is probably bad, probably worse than we are able to imagine. We are intentionally kept in the dark. (Ben Bernanke on Sunday's 60 Minutes a possibly nice exception.) It is hard for us to be "informed critics", or agents for change, because we are denied adequate information to become informed critics. This is happening in one of the better educated countries on the planet.

The lawmakers who are still believers in the unfettered free market and even "trickle down", and fantasy interpretations of the Great Depression and the excess that led up to it, are idiots one step "up" the knowledge chain from most of us. Their devoted followers, the people who keep them in office, and slavishly follow their every talking point, are a step further down. They want to believe a fantasy that never was, and certainly will never be: They think they'll win the lottery. They also like to think that what they have is theirs, and that sharing is their individual option.

I'm reminded of Orwells description of the Proles (the proletariat) in the book, 1984. I recall that Orwell portrayed the Proles as poor, easily manipulated dimwits: the boys hung out with the boys, getting drunk on cheap gin in the local pubs; the housewife cheerily hung the clothes on the clothesline, singing pleasantly as she did her drudge work; everybody was aware that their every move was being watched; but they were mostly left alone except when they had to stop everything to listen to the two-minute hate about the enemy of the day. They were passive actors in their own destruction. Orwell wrote the book in 1949, about the dangers of the Communist utopia, and the just defeated Nazis, but he was writing about us, too, in the first eight years of the 21st Century, in the United States of America. If you haven't reread 1984 recently, do. It is an eye-opener, about us, in the last eight years, especially.

Personally, I think we can recover, but it will be a slow, slow slog, and the true believers in what failed will be the last to be converted. I find myself latching on a wild hope: the present day Proles will create a better nation and world."

SEPTEMBER 2, 2009

Uncomfortable Essay #13: A summation, one year later

A year ago today, September 2, 2008, the Peace Island Conference convened at Concordia University in St. Paul MN. It was successful in all ways but making news. It was apparently too peaceful. Not even the media that would be considered as "left" leaning devoted attention to it. The "action" was down the street a couple of miles at the Republican Convention and its surrounding events. One year after the event, the "chatter" remaining is about residual court actions surrounding the RNC, the actions of the Police and the Protestors....

This seems an appropriate time to look back, and to look ahead.

A major lesson for me flowing from this past year: conflict really, really sells, **including within the Peace community**. Peace is not as much fun as doing battle.

About two weeks after the Peace Island Conference, September 12, 2008, I published at this space the first of what came to be twelve "Uncomfortable Essays" addressed to the general communities which advocate for Peace, Justice, Environment, Sustainability and Global Cooperation. Thereafter came eleven more essays, the last before this one, March 21, 2009.

All the Essays appear sequentially at this space, Dick Bernard's Venturing column at the website of the Minnesota Alliance of Peacemakers (MAP) <http://www.mapm.org>. At this website MAPs Guiding Principles are a constant reminder to those of us in these communities.

I have circulated these Essays broadly over the past year, and have often thought about their contents: Would I have changed what I said? Are there topics I left out?

Over time, no one has really challenged the pertinence or relevance of the Essays; at the same time, I have seen little evidence of even conversations about their contents. Change is difficult under the best of circumstances. When in doubt, the tendency is to do things as you've always done them.

(The general thrust of each Essay was as follows:

#1 - Summarizing the Peace Island Conference, and an earlier experiment on "Each one reach two" Sep 12, 2008

#2 - "Each one reach two" Sep 30, 2008

#3 - A review of "Power" Oct 15, 2008

#4 - Communication of a message to a changing audience Nov 9, 2008

#5 - Competition versus Cooperation as a prevailing value Nov 22, 2008

#6 - Money: a benefit or a curse? Dec 8, 2008

#7 - Fear of Succeeding Dec 22, 2008

#8 - The problem with calling something "the truth" Dec 25, 2008

#9 - Staving off Organizational Death Dec 29, 2008

#10 - Re-creating organizational Life Dec 31, 2008

#11 - Changing "Challenge of Change" into "Change we can believe in" Mar 4, 2009

#12 - The role of the common person in success or failure of the cause Mar 21, 2009)

As this year of Uncomfortable Essays ends, I am more convinced than ever that the essential insight came in the failed "each one, reach two" experiment that, along with the Peace Island Conference, makes up the core of Uncomfortable Essays #1 and #2.

Any organized group that harbors any hopes of long term success has to get very actively involved in what might be called micro-organizing, or as I refer to it in the Essays, "each one, reach two". Without the active engagement of the participants as micro-leaders, the entire movement will stay stuck, in my opinion. The current low ebb of energy is more than just a cyclical phase - a valley that we can only hope we will get through.

I gained a useful insight in why there might be resistance to "each one reach two" in a recent conversation with a well respected leader in the Peace and Justice community.

What blocked her, she suggested, was memories of a bad experience with some multi-level marketing (MLM) scheme in which one of her family had been involved. MLM was, it seemed to her, very much like "each one, reach two". Having experienced the abundant down-side of multi-level marketing myself, at a particularly low period in my life, I could understand her hesitation. In MLM, a dream is sold...but to achieve a dream requires an immense amount of hard work, and even after that hard work, only a few actually succeed. MLM is not a good model for most of us.

But, then, I got to thinking about this concept in a more long term way.

Minnesota Alliance of Peacemakers (MAP), the organization which hosts this column, has a fifteen year history.

IF, I thought to myself, MAP had started with a visionary leader whose sole objective was to find two people in the first year who shared his or her passion; and IF the sole objective of each of these two people were to find two more with a similar passion in the following 365 days, by this year, fifteen years later, the MAP network would encompass over 16,000 passionate people, all organizers organizing in their own spheres.

"Yah, but...", you say?

Yah.

Thanks for reading. Stay in action. My regular blog spot is <http://www.outsidethewalls.org/blog>. Thoughts of (what I consider myself to be) a moderate, pragmatic person, appear there on an average of every other day. Take a look, sometime. It is a space open to your own reflections, about these Essays, or anything else you wish to write about.

FIRST SENT AS A LETTER TO 50 PEOPLE APRIL 15, 2009. ADDED JANUARY 6, 2012

Uncomfortable Essay #14: Cooperative Financial Effort? Is it possible in the Peace and Justice Community?

April 15, 2009, I sent the following letter to 50 people who would be considered leaders in the local peace and justice movement. The text of the letter speaks for itself. Three people responded affirmatively, plus one additional community member. Eleven declined for various reasons and the other 36 did not respond. The \$20 "earnest money" was refunded to the four who responded, and no follow-up meeting was held. The idea remains useful, I feel.

April 15, 2009

Dear

If you're getting this letter from me, I am a known quantity to you.

Coming from very conservative roots, I am not one inclined to audacious behavior. This is an exception.

With this letter, I am asking you to pay me \$20, and to set aside \$1000 of your savings for use in the general area of Peace and Justice activities. I call this the "Thousand 1000s Initiative". Let me explain:

At the annual meeting of Mn Alliance of Peacemakers (MAP), Dec. 12, 2007, I distributed a letter to delegates then involved with MAP making some recommendations. Item C of that letter is reprinted at the end of this letter. Item C was an idea I thought had merit. I have heard of no action of any kind from any quarter on this idea since then, and it is my intention to "shake the bush", and see if there is any interest in the concept. You are one of 50 who I'm contacting, purposely mailing this on "tax day".

THE ISSUE: In preparing our taxes this year, I made special note of the tax-deductible money I paid to assorted organizations which relate directly to MAP, (excluding donations to my church, which is part of MAP). Deductible donations were made to ten MAP organizations, totaling \$1050, with an additional \$500 pledged during 2008, still to be paid in 2009. In addition, there were large donations of time and money for non-tax deductibles, particularly the Peace Island Conference, plus many others. (How much we donate or how much is deductible is not the issue for me. Again this year we hope to contribute as before.)

The issues for me: 1) small organizations compete with each other for scarce resources, and if some group wants to put on something significant, the money issue always looms, as it did with Peace Island Conference in 2008; 2) directly related, we “starve” volunteers who work for our movement, many of whom could use work and income. In our society, right or wrong, money conveys value. As a single but important example, there were zero personnel costs for the Peace Island committee. Each of us heavily subsidized the conference, including doing nearly all the work. If we all hadn’t donated everything, there would have been no Peace Island Conference. In my estimation, money is a major problem going far beyond “generosity”.

THE DREAM: Available money from people supportive of MAP (and related) communities is not the problem; rather the problem is a reluctance to or uncertainty about how to pool resources useable for the good of all. We covet our meager resources, and no one ever has enough. This Competition weakens, rather than strengthens us in working together on diverse issues. That is where the Thousand 1000s idea comes in.

THE PROPOSAL: You are the first people I am asking to consider this untested (so far as I know) possibility.

A. I am asking you, if you have the money available, to set \$1000 aside specifically for future use in Thousand 1000s. The minimum and the maximum set aside is \$1000. The money stays in your own account. You decide whether/where/how to invest it. You elect on a year to year basis whether to renew the commitment. You continue your past practice of other giving. The \$1000 I “covet” is money you know is extra, available if needed.

B. I am asking \$20 from each person or group answering this call (including myself: I’m on the court with this.) Half of that \$20 - 1% of \$1000 - goes to me as a fee. The other half - also 1% of \$1000 - is to cover expenses, such as printing of this letter, and the postage to mail it.

C. 2009 will be the time to assess whether there is any interest in this concept. Those who step up to the plate by June 21 will be invited to meet in person to discuss this concept further (hold that evening open on your calendar). If I'm the only one interested, maybe I'll meet with myself. If only one of you is interested, the two of us will meet. I do have a vision for how this will work, but it is only my vision. That is for another conversation later. Succinctly, I wouldn't start this until 2010, and only if there was a certain commitment level - perhaps \$100,000. If the commitment level was there, perhaps grants up to 10% of the available Principal (\$100 from each partner) might be awarded to qualified applicants. Etc. But that is for later.

So, how about you? Either I'll hear from you, or not. My address is on the letterhead.

Justice and Peace,

Dick Bernard

To Mn Alliance of Peacemakers Annual Meeting December 12, 2007 from Dick Bernard

"C. How about a "Thousand Thousands Initiative"? Over and over again I've noted that our organizations are, financially, poor in money terms, even though MAPs mission statement and the guiding principles we share likely reflect the sentiment of most citizens in our area, country and world. We work for positive future-oriented things but we're constrained by that old ogre, money.

It is not possible to get involved in everything. At a personal level, if I were to contribute only \$25 to each MAP member organization, that would now amount to nearly \$2,000 a year.

In recent months I have been wondering what would happen IF we could find 1,000 individuals and/or groups and/or groups of individuals (i.e. 100 giving \$10 each) who would be willing to pool \$1,000 of their non-tax deductible dollars to be placed in a single fund to help finance things like commercial media ads, etc. Of course, 1,000 1,000s equals \$1,000,000 - very serious money. [emphasis added] *I can think, probably, of almost all the objections people might have to this idea (who would control this money? etc., etc., etc.) But consider this: \$1,000,000 amounts to only 33 cents per resident in this metropolitan area of 3,000,000 population, 1,000 contributors are really a small number given our population, and certainly this would be an attainable goal IF we had the will."*

POSTNOTE JANUARY 6, 2012: Since the above letter was written, the awesome (and awful) power of pooled resources is beginning to be witnessed in the wake of

the U.S. Supreme Court ruling giving virtually unrestricted rights to wealthy and corporate interests to pool money to influence political campaigns. The playing field is not even anymore. Whereas this modest proposal envisioned raising one million dollars; 1,000 wealthy people and/or corporations can (and will) pool 1,000 times as much - one billion dollars.

MARCH 2, 2012

Uncomfortable Essay #15: Learning to organize in a different way*.

Over ten years ago, early October, 2001, I became acquainted with the Peace and Justice community. The catalyst: the bombing of Afghanistan - an action approved by 94% of Americans, but opposed by a small minority, including me.

Less than two years earlier I had retired from 27 years as a teacher union field representative in a collective bargaining state. I had been active in the union for several years prior to staff involvement; the latter part of nine years of teaching. For more than half of my career as an activist union member and staff there was serious and constant competition between two opposing teacher unions, much like the present day political parties with similar types of campaigns and elections. I got to know well things like Strikes, Grievances, Arbitration and Mediation of Disputes, etc.

(In my union, the goal was to have one staff person (like myself) for every 1200 dues paying members. Largely, this goal was met. Succinctly, roughly 1200 people felt they owned a piece of their staff person, but at the same time, considered him or her an outsider or even as management.... It was not always a comfortable position to occupy! Sometimes the feeling of power could go to a staff members head. This wasn't healthy either.)

I retired from this environment in early 2000. Less than two years later I came into what seemed to be a united peace movement made up of, and led by, people I didn't know. I became active, including being volunteer President of the Minnesota Alliance of Peacemakers (MAP, www.mapm.org) for three years, 2005-2007**.

Following my terms with MAP, I remained active, but was becoming increasingly "uncomfortable", which led to these Essays, beginning with #1 in September, 2008.

The unease has intensified.

While there are very marked differences, I note a striking parallel between the constituency called "organized teachers" and that called "peace and justice activists". With few and rare exceptions, leaders and activists are idealists who care deeply about their profession, and are selflessly dedicated. But I note what I seem is a crucial difference between the two groups.

In essence: in my entire professional career - over 30 years - of working with people individually and as part of their union, there was a unity of reason for belonging, but there were oft-times intense differences about priorities, etc. This disagreement could be about anything or everything. It intensified even more because of the inter-organizational competition for position and power.

But when it mattered, and unity mattered a great deal, there was a critical mass called "union".

Every step of the way in building a unified union, without even thinking about it, required negotiations of differences, which in turn involved compromises, including of cherished beliefs. This included union members who in their heart of hearts would rather have gone it alone for assorted reasons.

The end result was one of the strongest remaining union movements in the United States, one which frustrates the right wing (note assaults on bargaining by public employees in places like Wisconsin and Ohio and Indiana and Arizona and...Minnesota.)

What evolved wasn't perfect, but it worked.

The contrast I've noted with the peace and justice community is what appears to be an elevation of **differences** (cherished non-negotiable priorities) even within the community, as non-negotiable priorities, over **similarities** (common cause issues on which all can agree, "peace", for example.). Thus the Alliance of Peacemakers has over 70 autonomous member organizations, each with their own special interest, and after 16 years it remains a loose alliance, rather than a recognized organization with community standing.

Thus the alliance has no power, even with all its members, and this seems to be on purpose. Peace and Justice folks don't seem to "play" very well together, and don't seem interested in compromising their particular ideals with other equally strong ideals which may differ in some ways from their own, even if the final goal - peace and justice - is held in common.

There seems a fear of becoming an organization; and beyond that, what seems to be a fear of working with other external organizations whose aims might be even more different than our own, or which might require sharing scarce resources.

My frustration has led me to something of a persistent mantra: "can we talk?"

Over the course of these last three years, beginning March, 2009, I have done a lot of blogging at www.outsidethewalls.org/blog. One can search words in that blog and if one enters the word "dialogue", it shows up in 31 different posts I have written - roughly one of 20. (In each of these Essays I've had a simple request, stated in varying words: "can we talk?". I've seen no visible interest in so doing.)

Dialogue is relatively simple to define: My favorite quote is this, which I first saw in Joseph Jaworsky's book, **"Synchronicity, the Inner Path of Leadership"** (1996) and which I have frequently used (including in Essay #8 on page 20 of this document):

Preceding the chapter on "Dialogue: The Power of Collective Thinking", Jaworsky included the following quote from David Bohms "On Dialogue". It speaks to this business of talking with, rather than talking to or at others:

"From time to time, (the) tribe (gathered) in a circle. They just talked and talked and talked, apparently to no purpose. They made no decisions. There was no leader. And everybody could participate. There may have been wise men or wise women who were listened to a bit more - the older ones - but everybody could talk. The meeting went on, until it finally seemed to stop for no reason at all and the group dispersed. Yet after that, everybody seemed to know what to do, because they understood each other so well. Then they could get together in smaller groups and do something or decide things."

We have to learn to talk and work with others.

Absent this negotiations of ideas and actions we are doomed to irrelevancy.

END NOTES

* - When this draft was in essentially final form, I sent it to several teacher union organizers of my generation from Ohio, Wisconsin and Minnesota. I asked for their comments. Without attempting to fold them into the text, their comments follow without editing at the end of this page. I deeply appreciate their assistance.

** - Reference throughout is made to Minnesota Alliance of Peacemakers, most recent on page 37. The Mission Statement and Guiding Principles of MAP were most recently amended and adopted during my first term as MAP President in 2005. They remain the credo of the Alliance. They remain on the MAP website as the official document of the group: <http://www.mapm.org/mission.htm>

OUTSIDE ORGANIZER COMMENTS ON #15:

John Borgen, MN, retired teacher union staff for 40 years: Jan 16, 2012. I did read your "The Uncomfortable Essay." As I analyze your situation it appears there is no sense of PURPOSE. What IS the reason for existence? What are they attempting to accomplish? Why do they exist? What common values do they share? From your description it appears the P and J community exists to talk among themselves, argue over the fine points of sectarian POVs [points of view] and revel in the past. And the ideals which motivate the community are not aligned with actions/practices.

There are more than semantic differences between some useful words to describe ideals, motives and practices.

Vision = WHAT do you want

Mission = WHY do you want it?

Values = HOW are you going to get it?

These distinctions come from The Fifth Discipline by Peter Senge. You might find it useful to review in light of your diagnosis of the effectiveness of the P and J movement.

To quote someone else: without sharing there can be no justice, without justice there can be no peace, without peace there can be no future. From this, if it is correct, searching and striving for peace without securing some modicum of justice will not occur. Reading the SCARF document in light of this formula may be illuminating.

John, again, commenting on Feb. 6, 2012: My trip to Cuba last week and my reflections on the state of public education here in America, also including our role as union organizers here, lead me to some tentative positions. (I am going through some disturbing feelings of past inadequacies!)

As a union, at all levels, we were too slow acknowledging the many shortcomings of American public education after the NAR [A Nation at Risk document] in 1983. Later on, once we were seriously on the defensive, we allowed our advocacy of the idea and ideals of public education to be wishy-washy at best and non-existent at worst.

The unions (National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers) of public school workers need to be a stand up advocates for the idea of public education. Frankly it sometimes feels like the AFT has outmaneuvered the NEA on this point! Anyway, if public education is to survive the right wing which is hell bent on privatizing education, corporate interests and capitulating politicians, like Pres. Obama, we had better get ourselves, collectively moving in the right (actually the left) direction. I'd like to see school administrators put up a united front with the teachers, but I won't hold my breath.

I think protecting the integrity of public education for all students is an imperative we cannot abandon. It must become one of the driving purposes of the union. I want to believe our leaders can motivate the members and the general public to take up the cause before it is too late.

Bob Barkley, Ohio, retired national and state teachers union official, Feb 5, 2012: And as to organizing, two thoughts come to mind. The first is the word "engagement." I believe the key to organizing is engagement -- it is also the key to successful teaching.

The second thought is about identifying root causes. What separates many of the peace and justice folks is their addiction to various effects of a very few root causes. They must learn to coalesce and collaborate around root causes -- such as inordinate moneyed/corporate influence which, by the way, would be consistent with the basic principles of capitalism although most right-wingers haven't got a clue about that.

Bob again, Feb. 6, 2012 after reading John's post: I agree with John [referring to Feb 6]. My personal experience confirms what he is suggesting. NEA was dominated by the private sector unionist advocacy agenda. It placed respect for our industry way down the list rather than the teacher rights advocacy. Somewhat by happenstance I found myself moved -- not involuntarily -- from the traditional advocacy role to the professional side about half way through my career. It was in that second half where I became -- luckily -- associated with the NEA Learning Labs, became the first unionist to become a certified Malcolm Baldrige examiner, and served as liaison with the National Alliance for Business. The role I played in the association was not highly respected nor touted by the association in general-- it was before its time. Only recently have they seemed to accept such a role and they're still doing so hesitantly. AFT has been ahead from the get-go -- but not because they are smarter. My work with the Gates/KnowledgeWorks Foundations required that I work with both AFT and NEA affiliates. What I learned through all of this is that AFT districts tended to be less in denial about problems in education mostly because they represented troubled urban districts to a much greater extent than NEA. That also explained why the NEA urban affiliates sometimes became frustrated with NEA. For example, Columbus OH, where Jack Burgess worked, was much more progressive than OEA [Ohio Education Association] in general because of this same dynamic, I believe.

Bob, Feb. 21: As I have reread this growing epistle, a couple of thoughts came to mind.

First, I think the reason Peace and Justice folks don't necessarily "play well together" is that there is a huge amount of emotional attachment to their individual passions. I doubt, for example, that the Evangelical Baptists and the Lutherans will unite any time soon because of the emotional attachment they have to their peculiar views of a God/god and how best to worship him/her/it. They may talk to each other and even join together in pursuit of a few common beliefs, but they will soon go their separate ways. This is not too far from how the various progressive interest groups behave. They each believe that their particular passions is the most important and the only right thing to fight for.

Second, the primary effort in the Peace and Justice movement, as with the Democratic Party, must be to identify the root causes of their varied concerns. I have written you Dick about this several times over the years. It remains my primary concern.

For example, one root cause of much what concerns P & J folks is the influence of money and corporate influence in our national decision making. I believe that if we took all that is donated and invested -- both money and energy -- in the environmental interest organizations, the gun control advocacy groups, the gender focused groups, the anti-war interests, and all the other left-leaning interest groups, and combined all of that to correct the ills of our moneyed plutocracy, all the various special interests would find much greater sympathy and action for their causes.

The Right has learned to do this -- to focus on their view of "root causes." The Left has not.

Jermitt Krage, Wisconsin, retired teacher union staff, comments on Feb. 6, 2012: Thanks for the opportunity to reflect on some of the issues in your paper. It may not be what you want, but here are some of my thoughts.

I believe those of us who were staff experienced first hand the injustices created by administrators and school board members, created in some ways a deeper commitment to, and connections with the union movement from the 1960's to the mid- 1980's. I would agree with your statement "**when it mattered, and unity mattered a great deal, there was a critical mass called "union"**". (Prior to the [1983] Nation at Risk report)

We were on the front lines when dealing with "Bread and Butter" issues, but failed to understand the value of the "teacher's voice" in matters that impacted their work. I believe most staff were "stuck" on traditional methods of resolving issues, and that has had a long term impact on the organizations ability to look at themselves in new ways and had an impact on the image of the "teacher's union".

Thus, I agree there was an **"intense differences about priorities, etc"** and with the **way we dealt with them.**

I also believe the need for an expanded the set of priorities was a factor in **"the inter-organizational competition for position and power."** As negotiators and organizers working in the traditional union model, we had position and power. With the need of the union being more deeply involved in school restructuring, we were no longer the "experts". Those directly working with kids in the classroom (teachers, classified staff and parents) were more knowledgeable and had much greater expertise than we did. This required changing and expanded role (we had to continue to do the traditional work, but not necessarily in traditional union methods). It opened the opportunity (or required us) to become more collaborative (perhaps as facilitators of change), as traditional bargaining wasn't a vehicle for representing our members in their instructional related issues or kids learning environment.

In my opinion, we lost an opportunity to expand our influence and power in the school districts, communities and in the legislature. This has had a traumatic negative impact on public education as well as the union in my home state Wisconsin, as well as other states across the country.

Jack Burgess, Ohio, Retired large city teacher union President and staff, Feb. 4, 2012: Yes,

"Uniserv." Like a softserve, but messier. I was first employed by the Columbus [Ohio] local, in 1970, then brought into the state and national organizations when we unified and developed the Uniserv program for Ohio, in 1972. Tom Orr and I were the first Uniserv staff in the state--but not the first field staff.

As to peace, when I retired from teaching in 2002 I thought I would do more camping, writing, etc. But then W Bush and his supporters started that horrible war in Iraq. As that got underway, I went to demonstrations, etc.

Later, I worked as the Ohio labor coordinator, as a volunteer, in the Dean campaign.

I worked for him because he seemed to be the only candidate with a chance to win who opposed the war. Later, I worked for Obama for the same reasons. Meanwhile, I got back into a makeshift uniform to join Veterans for Peace. I'd never talked much about my service because it was in peacetime and I felt embarrassed to mention it around guys who had risked their lives. But I found when we march down the street in our old uniforms, with our American flag and our peace flag, we get a lot of good attention to our cause.

As Howard used to say,
Thanks for all you do,

March 10, 2012

Uncomfortable Essay #16: WWMD* and other thoughts on the changing environment for peace, justice, global and sustainability (PJGS) advocates.

As this is being written, March 10, 2012, Marv Davidov is being eulogized and celebrated by friends and supporters in St. Paul. No question, he was important to the Peace and Justice movement. He is a Hall of Famer.

***WWMD might mean, "What would Marv do?"** in these stirred up times. There can be alternative acronyms as well.

Marv represented a certain kind of activism. As I understand (I wasn't part of his base) he was a career protester - that's the kind of picture I get of him. I am not really sure that he would 'do' solutions very well. Problems were his gig. The picture I get is "on to the next protest" - so many problems, so little time.... We all get into these kinds of routines, stuck in what we know best, even if it might not be the most productive use of time or energy. It's what we're comfortable with.

These are times for PJGS to actively consider changes in tactics and strategies. Some thoughts:

POWER OF PEOPLE IS VIRTUALLY UNLIMITED, but with limits.

In recent days and weeks Rush Limbaugh, at the very pinnacle of the **Power of Media**, has been enduring a scare (which he'd never admit) of losing advertisers in droves because of comments he's made relating to women. Whether he survives after many years as a right-wing institution on the radio remains to be seen. It isn't listeners who make money for the stations. It is advertisers. And if advertisers desert his program, that is a big problem for Limbaugh.

The Komen Foundation top leadership recently learned a hard lesson as well. Their power was the **Power of the Cause**. They took for granted support which they could easily lose. The gentle breeze of benign support and loyalty can shift suddenly.

People do have power if they choose to exercise it. Limbaugh is noticing (if not acknowledging) this. The Komen people acted, but the damage was done. They will have to do hard work to recover.

Then there's my Catholic Bishops who in a heavy-handed exercise of their supposed **Spiritual Power** (or so they thought) made a move to dominate and control the conversation about contraception.

Individually or as a group they will never admit vulnerability, but those of us who

choose to fight the battle within the church know that the inside story is not pleasant...for the church. The protest comes not from raucous people in the pews or on the church steps, but rather in those who quietly leave, sometimes by less money in the collection basket, or loss of enthusiasm (selling, evangelizing) their church to others. And those of us who stay are not all docile sheep either....

At the same time, the Occupy Movement is (it seems) losing steam, because that same media isn't paying much attention to it. Without media attention, such movements collapse. It gets tiresome protesting on a street corner, when nobody much seems to care except those already involved. When the media leaves, the movement deflates due to lack of attention.

In our contemporary society we rely a great deal on **MEDIA POWER**. That is risky business, since we depend on an undependable base. I didn't see any coverage of Marv's going away gathering, for instance.

At the recent Nobel Peace Prize Forum, Doug Tice, editorial page editor of the Minneapolis Star Tribune, said it well about his sector, the Media: **"the most powerful bias in the press is the story - the unholy trinity of trouble, scandal, conflict is what gets the news."** That is a simple statement of fact.

The "unholy trinity" won't feed on old news forever, even beyond the next day. You can't blame the press (really, the media itself). They depend on readers and viewers who revel in the 'unholy trinity', and today's "trouble, scandal, conflict" is replaced tomorrow.

OF COURSE, THERE ARE MANY OTHER KINDS OF POWER.

Political Power people engage constantly in high risk behavior, hoping they won't be found out by "we, the people". **Business and Wealthy Power** people are probably giving more thought to consequences of corporate or ham-handed wealth actions, even though they wish for (and continue to aspire to) the good old days of the 1890s.

Power, Power, Power. It is all around in these and many more disguises.

Ultimately, People themselves - the 'body politic' - have all the power, but are often held back by their own tendency to play by someone else's script. If you're told you're powerless, and you play that role of powerlessness, you are, indeed, powerless. Similarly, if the choice is to play by the rules of another more powerful group, there are similar and unfortunate results.

Unfortunately (in my opinion), those folks who wish for another Marv Davidov, or pine about the good old days of protesting as exemplifying all that is good about the movement are looking backward, not forward. They worked then; today there is need for change.

It takes more than "lying in the streets" (Marv's mothers description of her sons

occupation) to accomplish anything, especially these days.

Indeed, it takes endless, frustrating, seemingly fruitless and always impure negotiations and compromising of sacred ideas to make change.

The road to Peace, justice, and to all else that is good, is a long slow process full of ruts, wrong turns, potholes....

It would be nice to get to MLKs mountaintop without having to endure the pain and compromises necessary to climb that mountain. As MLK attested from early on, the climb is not an easy one. There are others with differing objectives or points of view, many of them within your own movement. People have differing notions of what is effective. There is not a dominant method that works better than others.

What Marv did is important.

But we have to move on and acknowledgement that there is no unilateral, pure or easy route to success.

We are a part of this messy world, with all its opinions - not separate from it.

A FINAL THOUGHT

When all is said and done, I keep thinking back to the first two Essays in this series, on pages 3-7, written September, 2008.

In those two Essays I talked about the need for a new type of organizing, "each one reach two", broadening the base in a new way, by more active engagement in the real world by those who I saw as passive consumers of the Peace and Justice and related communities.

In my blog, in which this document will remain, I talked about this in a different way in the post for July 22, 2011 <http://www.outsidethewalls.org/blog/?m=20110722>, as follows: "I am of the belief that the only effective way for ordinary people - people like myself - to have an impact is one person, one contact at a time. We are so overwhelmed with "information" that there is little left to learn. If we're going to survive as a society, we need to talk with, even debate, each other, and really listen to other points of view. It isn't easy - those people standing in a circle yesterday, to have effect, need to turn around and act outwards towards people outside the Capitol rotunda. The only way to do this is to practice honing the skill, be it letters to the editor, standing up in a small or large meeting, giving a presentation, etc...."

I started on this journey many years ago, probably during 1963-65 when my first wife took ill of kidney disease and died, at age 22.

(<http://www.outsidethewalls.org/blog/?m=20110819>). I plan to continue.

Added July 10, 2012

Uncomfortable Essay #17: Taking the Offensive.

This is the first Essay to be added to the “mother” document, above. It flows from a continuing observation that my career constituency, teachers organized into unions, and my post-career passion, the peace and justice movement, have been forced into, and willingly remain in a Defensive mode.

The dynamic has reminded me of a long-ago lesson which I think has direct application to today’s organizers who are under attack. With minor modifications, I published the below to my own mailing list on July 2, 2012, as the rhetoric post-Supreme Court decision on the Affordable Care Act (ACA) began to rage.

July 2, 2012: “To be forewarned is to be forearmed”, as the saying goes. Though what I’m going to say is very old news. If the only game plan you have is defense, you lose. You need to change the conversation, both within your organization, and to the greater world outside.

Last night, I dusted off a single sheet of organizing tactics that were used against the organization of which I was neophyte Executive Director in 1972. A competitor was trying to take us over, and they were marshaling a very strong campaign.

They failed, I have long held this opinion, only because of one desperate act on our part: we decided to go on the offensive, rather than allowing the opponents to dictate the conversation.

In 1988, one of the opponents warriors gave me the script they had used against us. It was a single typed page, single side, double spaced. It is today’s right wing script, and it has been used religiously since Newt Gingrich first appeared on the scene. When he began to work his program, I heard 1972 and 1974 replaying themselves.... Boiled to its essence, here is the 1974 script, in the original words. **These words are from 1974, 38 years ago.**

- A. *“Our job is [not] providing services...We exist to organize.”*
- B. *“If it won’t get...votes, then don’t do it.”*
- C. *“Don’t try to solve the problems...Take advantage of and create problems for the incumbent....”*
- D. *“P.R. everything - disrupt - confuse - challenge - display anger.”*
- E. *“Find the angry people, the disenchanteds. They will be zealots for our cause.”*
- F. *“Look for the charismatic leader, preferably male, white....”*
- G. *“Blame the [incumbent] for every current and historical problem.”*
- H. *“Talk to as many...one-on-one, as possible. These individual “hits” are crucial.”*
- I. *“State the problem, blame the [incumbent] and promise the opposite. Promise*

nirvana.”

J. “Publish everything - spread lots of paper around.”

K. “Try to get the [incumbent] to react to defend themselves.”

L. “Always stay on the offense - never defend a charge or challenge from the [incumbent]. Always move quickly from issue to issue.”

M. “Brag about other [places] where we are the representative. Do it with mirrors.”

N. “Challenge to an election at every opportunity. Keep the situation disrupted and the [citizens] split.”

O. “Spread the battle cry, “Give us a chance, just give us one chance.”

That’s it. Does it sound familiar about how the Tea Party gained ascendance?

We bumbled along for two years, trying to defend ourselves from a constantly moving propaganda campaign, until we stumbled on our own stroke of genius: we went on the offensive. In the final month or two of the campaign, rather than lamenting how we could do better, we took credit for what we had done and were doing for those we represented, and in the election we prevailed very easily.

What we did was homegrown, unpolished, but more effective than any outside campaign could have been. The people we represented were, after all, like us, they liked us as colleagues, and I think we finally made the point that when the opposition was criticizing us, it was criticizing our members as well.

After we won, we chose to work with the enemy leaders, rather than treat them as losers. Initially it was very tense - I remember the first rapprochement gathering as very uncomfortable - but in the end our now mutually shared organization ended up much stronger, and our members were the beneficiaries.

Many years later the remnants of the competing organization marshaled one more election, based on a local issue. It failed. A few years later the two competing state-wide organizations merged. Now, 14 years later, those old wars are distant memories. Back to the present, I emphasize the present is NOT President Obama’s deal to “win”, nor is it the responsibility of any Party or power actor other than ourselves. It is up to all of us, one-on-one, letters to editors, conversations with crazy uncles, etc. Concentrating on finding someone to blame for our ills is, in my opinion, ‘stinking thinking’.

En Avant! (Forward!).”