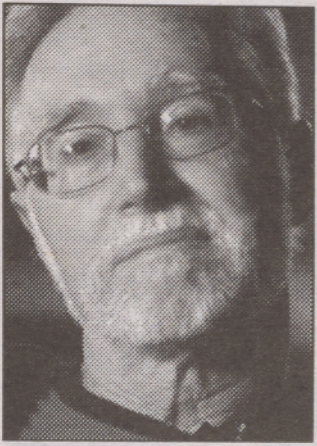


# What is to be done, and are we ready to do it?



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Anyone who still thinks ruling elites and the major political parties are going to solve the worsening economic and ecological crises must not be paying attention. Ruling elites in Europe and North America are doing nothing to solve the two great crises of our time, and much to aggravate them. So we better stop waiting for someone else to solve our problems and begin to figure out what we can do to save ourselves and the planet. We, the people, need to make progress on four fronts.

1. First and foremost we need to build bigger and stronger progressive reform movements. Old reform movements like the labor, civil rights, student, and environmental movements must be revitalized. New movements like Occupy and the anti-foreclosure movement, led by a new generation of activists, pioneering new tactics, must grow stronger. Otherwise we will never build majority support for change.

We must also build a granddaddy of all movements to launch a "Green New Deal." Scientists warn us that unless global greenhouse gas emissions are reduced by at least 80 percent before mid-century we run an unacceptable risk of triggering irreversible, cataclysmic climate change. Replacing fossil fuels with renewables, transforming not only transportation but industry and agriculture as well to be much more energy efficient, and rebuilding our entire built environment to conserve energy will be an immense, historic undertaking. What is needed if we are to avoid unacceptable climate change is the greatest technological "reboot" in economic history.

If we do not put hundreds of millions of people to work over the next few decades transforming Fossil-fuel-estan into Renew-serve-estan we will literally broil ourselves to death at some point in the century ahead. If we fail to create tens of millions of new jobs a year turning Fossil-fuel-estan into Renew-serve-estan the Great Recession will persist indefinitely and the young generation will face a jobless future. Two problems. One solution. A massive Green New Deal.

2. We also need to create more experiments in participatory, equitable cooperation, allowing more people to treat one another in ways that "prefigure" the new society. Without palpable proof that participatory, equitable cooperation is not only possible, but works better than competition and greed for people who embrace it, we will never convince people to support the kind of fundamental system change that will ultimately be necessary. In short, we need to build the beginnings of a "new economy" in the rotting carcass of an economy that has abandoned the 99%. We need to create more worker and consumer owned cooperatives. We need more

community supported, sustainable agriculture. We need to turn community development corporations into real vehicles for achieving community economic development – prioritizing job creation for disadvantaged residents rather than privileged outsiders, prioritizing renovation and affordable housing rather than gentrification, and empowering civic organizations rather than local kingpins. We need to launch campaigns for "participatory budgeting" where neighborhood assemblies decide how they want to spend a portion of their taxes. We need more egalitarian and sustainable living communities in urban as well as rural areas.

Reform work and building new institutions are both necessary, but neither strategy is effective by itself. Only in combination do they protect us from the predictable pit falls of each approach. Reforms alone cannot achieve equitable cooperation because as long as the institutions of private enterprise and markets are left in place to reinforce anti-social behavior based on greed and fear, progress toward equitable cooperation will be limited, and the danger of retrogression will be ever present. On the other hand, concentrating exclusively on organizing alternative institutions within capitalist economies also cannot be successful because it isolates us from too many who cannot become involved in our experiments, and because market forces constantly pressure non-capitalist institutions to abandon cooperative principles in favor of commercial success. Fortunately, working on reform campaigns helps overcome the danger of isolation inherent in building prefigurative projects, while continuing to improve our understanding of how equitable cooperation can work helps prevent people involved in reform work from "settling" for a slightly improved system based on competition and greed.

3. The left needs an electoral strategy. We cannot simply turn up our noses at "traditional politics" and stand aloof from electoral campaigns. We can complain about it, but the fact is a high percentage of people we must mobilize pay attention to politics primarily during election season. Abandoning the field whenever people come out to play the game is hardly a strategy for winning! Nor can we forever participate in elections only by running "protest" candidates who seek to expose the hypocrisy of traditional political parties and raise issues mainstream candidates and media avoid, but who have no chance of winning. Candidates with no chance of winning command too little attention not only from the media but from the public as well.

I am not suggesting we subordinate other areas of Left activism to focus more on

electing officials who sing a more progressive tune than their opponents during election season only to betray progressives who campaigned and voted for them once in office. Unfortunately, far from being the "beacon of democracy" tinhorn patriots claim, the U.S. Constitution – and a Supreme Court which abuses its power to interpret the Constitution to promote a conservative agenda – have become straitjackets preventing the popular will from manifesting itself through elections. At this point the odds against electing progressive politicians and holding them accountable to their campaign rhetoric in the U.S. are becoming prohibitive. We live in a two-party duopoly where both parties are increasingly beholden to corporations and wealthy donors. So progressives who prioritize electoral work in the U.S. must first and foremost wage major campaigns to win campaign finance reform and proportional representation before there is any hope of imitating the kind of success left political parties like Syriza had recently in Greece. This is a monumental, but necessary task. Since we in the U.S. need to build our own Syriza we must come up with a successful strategy to fix an electoral system that is rigged to make this impossible.

4. We will also need a strategy to defend popular victories from anti-democratic forces. There is no reason to believe ruling elites will abide by the results of fair elections, or shrink from destroying activist organizations and alternative experiments that challenge their ideology, power, and privilege. We must not only have a strategy to build but a strategy to defend what we build as well. The age of revolutionaries picking up the gun is over. If twenty-first century politics gives way to warfare we will lose. Therefore, our defense strategy – and we will need one – must be centered on organizing for massive resistance and non-compliance since no elite, no matter how well armed, can rule unless we, the people, carry out their orders.

While all these activities are necessary, not everyone must participate in every kind of activity. The most productive mixture will be different in different places and times, and political groups with different ideologies will prioritize one form of activity over another. But since we need to make a great deal of progress in all four areas there is little need to waste time now squabbling over which area is more strategic than others.

The good news is that here in Portland there are already more activists and organizations working productively on all four tasks than elsewhere in the country. It's time for more Portlanders to find an activity and organization to their liking and sign up! It is time to stop waiting for Godot.

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