

# Lesson 6: Protest & Survive

## PURPOSE

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013: I write this on the day that Nelson Mandela died. It's significant because liberating the Republic of South Africa from the scourge of Apartheid must have looked about as impossible to Mandela in the 1940s, 50s, 60s and 70s as getting governments to agree to the carbon emission cuts necessary to avoid catastrophic climate change look to us today. Mandela's message: NEVER give up! – is as powerful now as it was when he was serving his life sentence on Robben Island. We have to keep fighting. We cannot give up! For dreadful though Apartheid was, it did not threaten all life on the planet as climate change does. It did not threaten human survival as our uncontrolled greed does.

Yet it is hard for this generation of youth: in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, protest ended the Vietnam war; protest freed Mandela, achieved the Civil Rights in the USA for African Americans and ended Margaret Thatcher's hated Poll Tax in the UK. The history of Peace Child is all bound up with ending the Cold War – which happened in 1989, partly as a result of the youth/musical links we made between the young people of the USA and USSR. PCI was also involved in the Catholic / Protestant reconciliation movements that brought about the Good Friday Agreement that ended the Civil War in Ireland. We did performances in Central America which accelerated the moves towards the Escipoulas accords that ended the insurgencies there. We – and Peace Child International - grew up with a sense that protest worked. Protest won things! We got the results we wanted! But, since that fateful day in February 2003, when millions of people marched in capitals around the world to protest the US-led invasion of Iraq – and Bush and Blair ignored them totally – youth have been forced to get used to failure. (*There was a movement in Feb. 2003 that was calling for a general strike in the USA, UK and across Europe – which many feel would have stopped that insane, illegal war. But the protest movement's leadership didn't have the bottle for it. Also – Vanessa Redgrave argued for trying Saddam Hussein at the International Court in the Hague. See Discussion Points below.*) Failure became the norm: we failed to get a climate deal in Copenhagen; we failed to get a deal to build a green economy at Rio+20. The Occupy Movement appeared to fizzle out in failure – and the Arab spring, so full of hope, has morphed into an Arab Winter – with the forces of reaction back in power in Egypt, and authoritarian regimes still in power in Syria, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and elsewhere.

So – does protest not work any more? Are citizen movements pointless? Some would say so: but the purpose of Peace Child is to re-ignite belief that protest – that democratic movements of the people, by the people, for the people – can work. Indeed MUST work. We have to protest to survive. But – we have to learn how to protest more effectively: learning how to do that is the purpose of this lesson.

## BACKGROUND READING

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has.” *Margaret Mead*

“A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.” *Mohandas Gandhi*

“You have to be the change you want to see in the world.” *Mohandas Gandhi*

“Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man.” *Mohandas Gandhi*

“I submit that an individual who breaks the law that conscience tells him is unjust and willingly accepts the penalty by staying in jail to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the very highest respect for law.” *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

“During my lifetime, I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and see realized. But if needs me, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.” *Nelson Mandela*

“A person who won't die for something is not fit to live.” *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

- Everything by Mohandas Gandhi;
- Everything by Martin Luther King;
- *Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela

Waves of Protest - a series of essays edited by Jo Freeman and Victoria Johnson

New Internationalist – the magazine most activists in the UK, USA and around the world read: see: [www.newint.com](http://www.newint.com)

You should read and become familiar with the history of the world's great historical revolutions:

- The English Revolution (1640 to 1659 led by Oliver Cromwell)
- The French Revolution (1789);
- The Russian Revolution (1917)
- The Great March, China (1949)
- The revolutions that ended the Warsaw Pact (1989)

You should read up on the other revolutions – those of 1848 across Europe, the Chartists and the Peasants Revolt in the UK – and, of course, the revolutions that failed like the one dramatized by Victor Hugo in Les Misérables (1831)

The revolution that takes humanity out of the fossil fuel era (the 'Brown Economy') into the era of renewable fuels and sustainability (the 'Green Economy') - is likely to be more similar to the long, relentless protests against Slavery, or the Anti-colonial movements of Gandhi, the suffragette, feminist, Civil Rights or Anti-Vietnam War movements. And it is likely to be conducted and driven by social media online. So – check out the following online advocacy sites:

- Digital campaigning: [www.avaaz.org](http://www.avaaz.org); [www.change.org](http://www.change.org); [www.purpose.org](http://www.purpose.org);

## DISCUSSION POINTS

1. “We are a billion strong on Facebook! We don't need to be on Tahrir Square!” Really? Do you believe that **the internet has the power to change the world**?
2. How important is **charismatic leadership** by an individual to the success of a Revolution – Lenin in Russia, Mao in China, Cromwell in the UK, Danton and the others in France? But in this last - the French Revolution of 1789 – was it not leadership by the mob? It was they who stormed the Bastille without leaders. Can it be the same for the Climate Change revolution? Or does some one commands enough respect internationally to lead it? Is that what it needs?
3. **People vs. Government:** “*If the people lead, the government will follow!*” True or False? There are strong arguments that say that governments have to lead – governments must impose the green taxes that will lead people to the more eco-friendly purchasing options because they are cheaper. It worked with Unleaded vs. Leaded petrol. Its working with long-life light bulbs. But can governments legislate for things that the people don't want? Discuss!
4. **It's got to get worse before it gets better!** Must it?! Do we really have to wait until the sky falls in – or the seas start inundating large tracts of land in Asia, Europe and North America before our governments wake up and do something?! Surely enlightened and informed politicians of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century can take decisions to 'meet the needs of future generations' – before millions have to suffer and die?! Or, because future generations don't vote or pay taxes, will the citizens of the present never really care about those future?
5. **Replace the Law of Force with the Force of Law** – as noted above, during the Feb. 2003 protest rallies against the Iraq War, Vanessa Redgrave argued that Saddam Hussein should be tried for his crimes at the International Criminal Court in the Hague. Ken Keyes wrote a famous book, The Hundredth Monkey back in the 1980s about replacing the Law of Force with the Force of Law – in which he makes very strong arguments for an international legal framework backed up by an international police force replacing national military defence forces. What do you think? How do you arrest and prosecute some one like Robert Mugabe whose army terrorises his people? Or Bashir Assad of Syria? Or Omar al-Bashir of Sudan – already under criminal indictment by the ICC, but who is never likely to go? Is there any point in trying them 'in absentia'? Discuss.
6. **Bureaucrats** – from the janissaries of the Ottoman Empire to the Eurocrats in Brussels and the International Diplomats at the United Nations – will never contemplate a revolution of the kind that is needed because they are concerned about keeping their jobs and their pensions. Some say, “A bureaucrat is a person who has had their brain surgically removed and replace by a rule book – and their heart ripped out and replaced by a plastic pressure pump.” They are less than human – and human problems don't concern them. Is that fair? Can bureaucracies drive forward a revolution? Or only stifle revolutionary fervour?

## IMPROVISATIONS

- A. **Brainstorming the Revolution!** First decide: are revolutions created by intellectuals or by rabbles of frustrated poor people? Depending on that decision, set the scene: Lenin, Trotsky and their friends, sipping crème de menthe in Zurich planning their revolution – intellectually – to help the poor; or a rabble, getting drunk in a filthy bar – shouting and banging the tables. The revolution – of course – is getting governments and business to change course and build the green, sustainable economy – but they are not going to do it voluntarily. They are going to have to be forced – to be over-thrown and replaced by a revolutionary council which will do what needs to be done. Set either – or both(one-after-the-other!) – scenes and encourage your cast to brainstorm different approaches to achieving the revolution. See what new ideas emerge and write them down.
- B. **The Beauty Contest: Exploring the Limitations of Leadership:** Set up a podium on the stage – and get each cast member to prepare a speech explaining why they should elect them to be the leader

of their revolution. It starts with the costume and make-up: how should they look to be compelling as a leader? And then the entrance! How should they hold themselves? Should they go straight to the podium and start speaking? Or should they go and shake hands and ingratiate themselves with the audience first. And the speech itself? There are many great ones to look at: Mark Anthony's speech in Julius Caesar: (See Marlon Brando at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7X9C55TkUP8>) Charlie Chaplin's speech in the "Great Dictator" (See: <http://www.charliechaplin.com/en/synopsis/articles/29-The-Great-Dictator-s-Speech>) Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" (See: <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2013/08/27/transcript-martin-luther-king-jr-have-dream-speech/>) President Obama's speech at Nelson Mandela's funeral: (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/10/remarks-president-barack-obama-prepared-delivery>) Almost any speech by Winston Churchill, perhaps particularly the one of 4 June 1940: (<http://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/speeches/speeches-of-winston-churchill/128-we-shall-fight-on-the-beaches>)

From these speeches, the cast should learn how to woo their audience, to get them on to their side, to build an argument, to set that argument within the sweep of history – to give their speech grandeur and style, to establish both their presence and their wisdom through oratorical greatness which is invariably identified with strong emotional phrasing and delivery.

- C. **Cyber-bullying:** Every one knows what cyber-bullying is, but we believe that it is not damaging at all for young people to know how it works. By knowing how it works, they will be able to take steps to defend themselves against it. And – in this exercise – we want the members of your cast to explore how to cyber-bully their friends in a good way: to persuade them to take action to prevent climate change! – to plan a cyber-campaign to get all your friends to join the school strike! So – divide them into groups of 3 to 4 and explain the assignment:
1. Assemble the arguments: why should they take part? What's at stake?
  2. Write the campaign e-mail: how do you grab their attention in the first line? How do you keep them reading until the end? What inducements do you offer them to take the action?
  3. Follow-up? How do you make sure your friends and colleagues have taken the action you asked them to? What additional 'bullying' can you think of to make them do it?
  4. Write everything up – and gather the cast to listen to each other's approaches. Take a vote to see which approach your cast thinks is the most effective.