WONDERINGS

The past several weeks have been a very active and challenging time for the peace and justice movement. With the sending of troops to Honduras, protest demonstrations of various types took place in over 200 cities, most demanding troop withdrawal and no more aid to the contras. Here in the Twin Cities we experienced an almost daily call for action in the streets. Though each demonstration sprung from the same basic impulse, every one was unique. Each event posed many old and new wonderings for this participant.

Wonderings such as: What is the message of this event? Are we using our best creative thinking in how this demonstration is to unfold to its conclusion? Was there much pre-planning of this street gathering? Or, was it merely an attempt to vent personal anger, frustration and fear with little thought to how it attracts or speaks for those who would not attend? People of many ages attended. One person was overheard saying as he turned over a dumpster, "I have never been 'politically active' before today, this is great!" Many - including the media - have reacted to the damage to property and patriotic symbols by placing focus on the property damage as the "important message" not the killing and torture our and other governments are doing to the people of Central America.

If these demonstrations are trying to change the non-demonstrator's minds about U.S. policy, was this an effective way? Or, was it indeed just a time to vent anger? What of the police violence on the protesters who did not move quickly enough? Was this but a reaction to the previous days response to their ordered low visibility? The police admitted they were called names and that their masculinity was challenged. What does this do to the policeperson who is following orders to abuse the protesters?

The substantative questions still are being asked. What tactics are most effective in stating our message? If we in the peace and justice movement are truly committed to non-violent protest and persuasion, how willing are we to commit ourselves to the discipline of non-violent study, training and practice? Are we willing to study such works as Gene Sharp's three part series, "The Politics of Nonviolent Action"?(In part II he lists 198 methods of nonviolent protest and persuasion.)

The challenge within the peace and justice movement is to begin to find ways to become more effectively creative and direct in our strategies and tactics as we work for nonviolent social change.

John E. Martinson

Friends for a Non-Violent World publishes this newsletter four times per year in January, April, July and October. FNVW has its roots in the Quaker faith and has been shaped in the power of nonviolence as a way of effecting change.

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continued from page 1

When and how do we challenge racist statements and actions? What do we like about being white? What price do we pay for white privilege? Why are so many "peace and justice" organizations all white? Whites do have access to power. We have the ability to move in and out of the system. Also, we have an ability to move in and out of the struggle for equality and justice. Many white middle class people have just enough to make us believe the myth that we can do anything or be anything we want to become. We WANT to believe the myth.

In the process, we have numbed ourselves to the fact that we are being kicked by some of the same forces that kick poor people and people of color.

Racism and sexism

There is no such thing as "generic" sexism. There are a lot of differences in what feminism means for white, black, Hispanic and Indian women. Only the white women's movement presumes to speak for "all women". Sexism has also been used to keep racism in place. (The archetype of the black rapist is an example.)

Liberation for black women will not come simply through the feminist movement. Sexism does exist in the black community. Black men as a group do not have real social power over white women. White women have benefitted directly from the white power structure. Under what circumstances can white women call black men sexist without being racist?

Beyond guilt

Undoing racism will take more than good intentions. We have a 500 year history of subtle and profound abuse. Working to undo that past will be slow going.

At the same time undoing that history does not mean adding an extra issue to the agenda. It is instead the process of how we do the work we already do. We either consciously chip away at the system, or we allow it to stand unchallenged.

Conclusions

It was not always easy or comfortable to take part in these discussions. But underlying the whole experience was a sense of safety and openness: a willingness to examine ourselves and challenge each other. We opened our hearts and our minds. Without taking that step, all others are impossible. We won't see true racial justice in this country in our lifetimes. But it may never happen without us.

by Barry Beckel-Kleider