OMNI ACTION FOR PEACE, JUSTICE, AND ECOLOGY Newsletter #5, November 27, 2012. Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace, (#2: June 23, 2011; #3 1-1-2012; #4 April 9, 2012))

Here is the link to all OMNI newsletters: http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/  For a knowledge-based peace, justice, and ecology movement and an informed citizenry to recreate the world.

Most of OMNI’s newsletters could be filed under ACTIVISM: Gandhi, MLKJr, nonviolence, etc. etc. The stories and arguments cover a broad range of striving for world peace, justice, and environmental preservation. The only restriction is the rejection of violence.

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Z Magazine January 2012
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FRANKLIN FOLSOM, *Impatient Armies of the Poor: The Story of Collective Action by the Unemployed, 1808-1942.*

Publication Date: **January 1991**

Behind the unemployment benefits and social security cheques that millions of Americans receive today lies a long series of dramatic actions. This book tells the very human story of these actions and reveals the jobless of past depressions as creators of many important features of today's social landscape. The result of more than fifty years of research, this is the definitive study of the activities of America's unemployed throughout US history up to the outbreak of World War 2. Generously illustrated with rare or hitherto unknown photos, drawings, and cartoon, this is a poignant story about triumph in the face of great obstacles, or
creative response to hardships by those who had suddenly been cut loose from society, or penniless human beings who have made history. Franklin Folsom, an active participant in the stirring events of the 1930s, presents a moving tribute to the heroism of obscure workers who solved some of the basic social problems they did not create but had to overcome in order to survive and live in dignity. Folsom's smooth and intimate style, coupled with his own perspective of the last half-century, pulls the reader into the very heart of US labour and social history. The result is a work full of compassion as well as information that should become a standard for all interested readers of our long and tumultuous history of organised labour.<

101 Changemakers: Rebels and Radicals Who Changed US History, edited by Michele Bollinger and Dao Tran
In the great tradition of Howard Zinn, 101 Changemakers offers a “peoples’ history” version of the individuals who have shaped our country for middle school students. In the place of founding fathers, presidents, and titans of industry, are profiles of those who courageously fought for social justice in America: Tecumseh, Harriet Tubman, Mark Twain, César Chávez, Rachel Carson, Harvey Milk, Henry Wallace, and many more. 101 Changemakers aims to provide young students with new ways of understanding how history is written and made.

About the author
Michele Bollinger lives in Washington, D.C., where she teaches high school social studies.
Dao X. Tran is an editor based in the Bronx, New York. Dao is currently working on the Domestic Worker Oral History Project. When not reading for work and pleasure, she enjoys time with her daughter Quyen, a changemaker of a different sort.

Great Peace March for Global Nuclear Disarmament 1986
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The Great Peace March for Global Nuclear Disarmament, Inc. (also referred to as The Great Peace March, GPM, and the March) was a cross-country event in 1986 aimed at raising awareness to the growing danger of nuclear proliferation and to advocate for complete, verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons from the earth. The GPM
consisted of hundreds of people, mostly but not exclusively Americans, who convened in Los Angeles, California, USA, in February 1986 to walk from L.A. to Washington, D.C., the nation's capital. The group left Los Angeles on March 1, 1986 and arrived in Washington, D.C. on November 15, 1986, a journey of about 3,700 miles, nine months, and many campsites.
Dear VFP Friends, 12 Days Left to Help Fund: "PAYING THE PRICE FOR PEACE: The Story of S. Brian Willson".

Mon Oct 1, 2012. Posted by: "Frank Dorrel" frankdorrel

As you probably know, I am working with award-winning filmmaker Bo Boudart & Brian on this very important documentary: "PAYING THE PRICE FOR PEACE: The Story of S. Brian Willson".

This will be a film about Brian’s incredible journey. It will also include many other well known anti-war activists involved in the Peace Movement, who love & respect Brian. (See list below).

You can click on the picture below of Brian & Bo to donate on-line and to see the short trailer. A BIG THANKS to all of you who have already donated to the film.

If you can make at least a $25 donation to support this important film, two things will happen. One, you will receive a DVD copy of the film when it is finished.

Two, you will have helped us to reach our goal of $55,000 by October 11th. Right now we have raised $24,205. We have 12 days to go on this Indiegogo On-Line Campaign.

Important Links for S. Brian Willson:

Here is Brian’s interview on Democracy Now with Amy Goodman on October 28th, 2011. - www.democracynow.org/2011/10/28/blood_on_the_tracks_brian_willsons

You can watch Brian’s 8-minute segment from my film: ‘What I’ve Learned About US Foreign Policy’ at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Rkvl9XHCYU &feature=related

Any & all of Brian’s essays on his website are well worth reading. You can also read about his new book: BLOOD ON THE TRACKS: The Life & Times of S. Brian Willson at: www.brianwillson.com

You can click on the picture below of Brian & Bo to donate on-line and to see the short trailer.

If you would like to make a contribution but would rather not donate on-line, you can send a check made out to Bo Boudart Productions to:

Bo Boudart Productions - PO Box 7395, Menlo Park, CA 94026

<http://www.indiegogo.com/payingthepriceforpeace> cid:image001.png@01CD94DA.9CD664D0
Bo has already interviewed Daniel Ellsberg, Father Roy Bourgeois, Medea Benjamin, Col. Ann Wright, Martin Sheen, Alice Walker, Phil Donahue, Bruce Gagnon, Camila Mejia, Charlie Clements, Charlie Liteky, Duncan Murphy, Ray McGovern, Lou Wolf, Leah Bolger (current president of Veterans For Peace), Elliot Adams (past president of VFP), Jeff Paterson (of Courage to Resist), David Swanson, Mike Prysner, Carlos Escorcia and others. He still plans to interview Blase Bonpane, Amy Goodman, Kris Kristofferson, Ron Kovic, Ed Asner, Kathy Kelly & Cindy Sheehan.

So far we have raised $24,205. We are trying to raise $55,000 by October 11th. Aris Anagnos gave $5,000 for this film. Another unnamed person gave $5,000. I put in $1,000. Annie Basile gave $1,000. Randy Ziglar gave $1,000. Francis Fisher gave $500. Medea Benjamin gave $500. Linda Wiles gave $500. Veterans For Peace LA Chapter gave $500. Veterans For Peace National gave $200. Noam Chomsky gave $200. Former CIA analyst Ray McGovern gave $200. <http://www.indiegogo.com/individuals/1088415> Valerie Sklarevsky gave $200. Maureen Cruise gave $200. Mark Dubrow & Andy Sehic gave $200. Joel Andreas, author of Addicted To War gave $100. Dana Visalli gave $100. Holly Rauen (Brian’s ex-wife) gave $100. Leah Bolger gave $100. Pat Bonner gave $100. Bruce Gagnon gave $100. David Hartsough gave $100. 43 people have given $25 or $30, which gets them a DVD copy of the film once it’s completed. Eight people have given $50. Some have given $10. Some $15. It all adds up. I hope you might be able to give whatever amount you are comfortable with. If you cannot afford any money at all, I do understand.

If you would like to make a contribution but would rather not donate on-line, you can send a check to:  Bo Boudart Productions  PO Box 7395  Menlo Park, CA 94026

LOVE IN ACTION BY THICH NHAT HANH, 1993.

Vietnamese Buddhist Monk Thich Nhat Hanh is a teacher, an author, and a peace activist. He coined the term Engaged Buddhism and has been a world leader in non-violence practices and teachings.

Nhat Hanh joined a Zen monastery at the age of 16, studied Buddhism as a novice, and was fully ordained as a monk in 1949. In the early 1960’s, he founded the School of Youth for Social Services (SYSS) in Saigon, a grass roots relief organization that rebuilt bombed villages, set up schools and medical centers, and resettled families left homeless during the Vietnam War.

He created the Order of Interbeing in 1966, and established monastic and practice centers around the world. His home is now Plum Village Monastery in the Dordogne region in the South of France.

Nhat Hanh continues to be active in the peace movement. He has sponsored retreats for Israelis and Palestinians encouraging them to listen and learn about each other and given speeches urging warring countries to stop fighting and look for non-violent solutions to problems.

In 2007, Thich Nhat Hanh received permission from the Vietnamese Government to return to Vietnam to untie the wounds of war. The 70 Day trip included retreats for lay people and monastic, meetings with Government Officials, Social Services Work, and three, three day long chanting ceremonies in the key cities of Ho Chi Ming City, Hanoi and Hue.

FROM THE OMEGA INSTITUTE
The New York Times has written, "Among Buddhist leaders influential in the West, Thich Nhat Hanh ranks second only to the Dalai Lama." He has published more than 100 books, including Peace Is Every Step, Being Peace, Touching Peace, Living Buddha Living Christ, Teachings on Love, and Anger.

Born in Vietnam in 1926, he became a monk at the age of sixteen. The Vietnam War confronted the monasteries with the question of whether to remain meditating in the monasteries or help the villagers suffering under bombings and other devastations of war. Thich Nhat Hanh chose to do both, helping found the "engaged Buddhism" movement.

After visiting the United States and Europe in 1966 on a peace mission, he was banned from returning to Vietnam. On subsequent travels to the United States, he made the case for peace to federal officials. He persuaded Martin Luther King, Jr. to publicly oppose the Vietnam War, which helped galvanize the peace movement. In 1967, King nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Thich Nhat Hanh has addressed audiences at the White House World Summit Conference on HIV and AIDS, The Gorbachev World Forum and the World Economic Summit in Davos, Switzerland. He has led retreats on mindful living for Vietnam veterans, prison inmates, ecologists, businessmen, police officers and members of Congress. Just a few days after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, Thich Nhat Hanh preached nonviolence and forgiveness in a memorable speech at Riverside Church in New York City.

The Compassionate Rebel: Energized by Anger, Motivated by Love [Paperback]
Burt Berlowe (Author), Rebecca Janke (Author), Julie Penshorn (Author)
Publication Date: February 1, 2002

The Compassionate Rebel illuminates a hidden culture where compassion and rebellion are combined in revolutionary ways. This timely book presents the insightful, hope-filled discovery that anger and love, typically thought of as opposites, can, together, provide a powerful force for positive change in the world. The 50 true, inspirational stories about overcoming injustice, abuse and despair will surprise shake, and stimulate readers to find their own personal power as compassionate rebels. The book, with its impressive photos and coffee table format, challenges humans to evolve, beyond connecting anger with shame or rage, to connecting it with compassion.

Review

"This book is an incredible resource for anyone. . . the stories . . . portray their subjects as approachable people. . . -- Patricia Cumbie, The Edge Newspaper

"This is one of the most enlightening and inspiring books that I've ever read." -- Carter McNamara, management and organization development consultant
About the Author

The authors live in the Twin Cities area. **Burt Berlowe** is a journalist, published author and active citizen with a history of involvement in numerous social and political causes. **Rebecca Janke** is a former Montessori teacher. She and co-author **Julie Penshorn** are the Co-Directors of Growing Communities for Peace, a nonprofit organization and publisher of the book. Together they have authored several curricula for early childhood and elementary teachers to use with their students. Julie Penshorn also is a musician, and is the producer of "The Compassionate Rebel" CD (available in May 2002). Most of the 53 black and white photos in the book were taken by Todd Cota, who is a teacher, community educator, and a parent.
the winding road of social transformation.

Walk with runaway 12-year-old Jodie Evans, as she painfully logs the miles that distance her from her home and family, long before she becomes a social change pioneer; with migrant farm worker Ana Castillo wearily trudging through the seemingly endless rows of corn that she has to conquer before sundown; with Muslim-American Sami Rasouli picking up trash and making peace on war-torn Iraqi streets.

Ride with Diana Knobel through miles of devastation as she delivers yet another round of supplies to the victims of Hurricane Katrina; with Marv Davidov on a freedom riders bus boldly venturing into the teeth of civil rights turmoil. March with Mary Heller and the million moms for gun control, Lu Saminiego championing immigrant rights, and Mel Duncan protesting war in the shadows of the White House. Meet Lynn Hoelzel, who overcame a lifelong battle with mental illness by discovering an ability to make people laugh, and Muriel Simmons, an elderly grandmother and surrogate mother, who turned around a crime-infested neighborhood with the help of an old-fashioned snow cone machine.

In this second Compassionate Rebel anthology (learn about the first book here), we continue to tell stories of ordinary citizens who have overcome adversity and channeled their anger at injustice into positive action. But unlike the first locally-focused book, these compassionate rebels come from all over the world. And their stories, written by a variety of authors, cover a broad range of relevant topics, including war and peace, civil and human rights, immigration, ecology and sustainability, education, community building, spirituality, health and wellness, electoral, corporate and media reform, and the new youth movement, among others.

These stories are placed in chapters that represent categories of compassionate rebellion. In "Ground Zero Heroes: and "Peaceful Messengers" we focus on stories of caring and courage during 9/11 and from Vietnam to Iraq and beyond, on the battlefield and in the streets of communities here and abroad. "Freedom Riders/Freedom Fighters" highlights the latest version of the civil rights movement, spotlighting the struggles and triumphs of immigrant citizens working to make America a better place to live.

The "Community Builders" chapter covers a variety of grassroots efforts from urban neighborhood organizing to rural co-operatives and communal living with an emphasis on preserving the health of the planet and those who inhabit it. The section of the book called "The Care Givers" ranges from a gallant mission in the wake of Katrina and compassionate efforts to save families and children in Africa and Vietnam to the compelling stories of individuals who have risen above personal setbacks to bring joy and healing to others.

"Speak Out Sisters" looks at the contemporary women's movement through the lens of several female activists struggling with personal empowerment while transforming our culture. "Generation Next" features examples of a newly emerging youth movement that literally holds the future of the world in its hands. In our closing chapter titled "The Reformers" we focus on efforts to reform three of our most basic and vital forms of democracy: electoral politics, the media and corporate capitalism.

The "Afterword" emphasizes the importance of storytelling as a way to change society, and offers readers a chance to find and tell their compassionate rebel stories. It also is a reminder that deep down inside we are all part of the compassionate rebel revolution.

By Howard Zinn, Edited by Anthony Arnove.

Howard Zinn has illuminated our history like no other U.S. historian. This collection of his speeches on protest movements, racism, war, and topics vital to our democracy will be an invaluable resource for the new generation of students who continue to discover his work, as well as the millions of people who Howard moved and informed in his lifetime.

Reviews

“Reading Howard’s spoken words I feel that I am almost hearing his voice again. Even in writing its unique appeal comes through — his stunning pitch-perfect ability to capture the moment and the concerns and needs of the audience whoever they may be, always enlightening, often stirring, an amalgam of insight, critical history, wit, blended with charm and appeal. I’ve heard Howard speak to tens of thousands at demonstrations, to small groups of homeless people, to activists enduring brutal treatment, and at many other times and places. Always just the right tone and message, always inspiring, a gift to all of us to be treasured.”
—Noam Chomsky

“Few people changed more lives than Howard Zinn. He changed them as an author, as a playwright and as a filmmaker. But he also changed them face-to-face, as a speaker. With ferocious moral clarity and mischievous humor, Howard turned routine anti-war rallies into profound explorations of state violence and he turned staid academic conferences into revival meetings for social change. Collected here for the first time, Howard’s speeches — spanning an extraordinary life of passion and principle — come to us at the moment when we need them most: just as a global network of popular uprisings searches for what comes next. We could ask for no wiser a guide than Howard Zinn.”
—Naomi Klein, author The Shock Doctrine

“Howard Zinn — there was no one like him. And to hear him speak was like listening to music that you loved — lyrical, uplifting, honest. If you never got to hear him speak, this book will move you in profound ways. Although Howard’s ‘voice’ is no longer with us, his true voice will live on forever. And I know he would love it for each of you to find your voice, too, and to be heard. Perhaps this book will provide you with some inspiration.”
—Michael Moore

“Howard Zinn was one of us, the best part of us. Enjoy these speeches. Hear his voice. Then hear your own, hear it closely.”
“One of my favorite expressions from Nicaragua is: ‘Struggle is the highest form of song.’ In that case Howard Zinn is one of our great singers and these speeches are righteous songs filled with the boldness, vision, humor, depth and urgings of his profoundly human voice. Howard sang a different America, an invisible America, an America of the 99 percent. He sang of the lies and deceit of the government and the impossibility and horror of wars made in America’s name. He sang of a dream, a deeper dream that is now rising in the streets. I cannot think of a more important set of songs to be singing at this time.”
—Eve Ensler

“Howard Zinn’s speeches, beautifully gathered together here by Anthony Arnove, are a joy and an inspiration.”
—Marisa Tomei

“Howard Zinn’s towering legacy will forever be as a historian who made history. He made history because his books, his actions, and especially his speeches inspired ordinary people to do extraordinary things. We fight onward today in a remarkable tradition of struggle. For many of us, we first became aware of this tradition by sitting in a packed, musty meeting hall and listening to stories of heart, humor, and heroism, as communicated by Howard Zinn.”
—Dave Zirin

"The first time I heard Howard Zinn speak I was a student in the deep South, and amazed that anyone could stay alive long enough to say such things. He was completely fearless, totally relaxed, making joking asides as he went straight to the bloody heart of Empire. How much time it has saved me, having him as a teacher my second year in college. Reading this book brings back memories of those times when Howie spoke to sometimes shocked crowds of people who, before hearing him, had thought historians should be silent about current affairs or, at most, write quiet books. Howard Zinn was a free man. Delightful because of this. Howard Zinn Speaks is a book to savor. It is wise, humorous, serious, without one moment of hesitation in tackling the basic notions about who we are as a people, a country, and a world. Elder brother, great teacher. Presenté."
—Alice Walker

"I hesitate to comment on Howard Zinn Speaks because of my unshakable and overt bias for anything Zinn. I don't think it'd be fair honestly to gloat about his work in such a way. But then again having a Zinn bias just means you favor truth and justice over lies and oppression."
—Lupe Fiasco

By Amy Goodman and Denis Moynihan, Foreword by Michael Moore

In their new book, The Silenced Majority, Amy Goodman and Denis Moynihan provide a vivid record of the events, conflicts, and social movements shaping our society today. They give voice to ordinary people standing up to corporate and government power across the country and around the world. Their writing and daily work at the grassroots public TV/radio news hour Democracy Now!, carried on more than a thousand stations globally and at democracynow.org, casts in stark relief the stories of the silenced majority. These stories are set against the backdrop of the mainstream media’s abject failure, with its small circle of pundits who know so little about so much, attempting to explain the world to us and getting it so wrong.

About the author

Amy Goodman is an award-winning investigative journalist and syndicated columnist, author and the host of Democracy Now! airing on more than 1,000 public television and radio stations in 35 countries. Goodman is the first journalist to receive the Right Livelihood Award, widely known as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize' for "developing an innovative model of truly independent grassroots political journalism that brings to millions of people the alternative voices that are often excluded by the mainstream media." The Independent of London named Amy Goodman and Democracy Now! "an inspiration"; pulsemedia.org placed Goodman at the top of their 20 Top Global Media Figures. Goodman is the author of four New York Times bestsellers. Her latest book, Breaking the Sound Barrier, proves the power of independent journalism in the struggle for a better world. She co-authored the first three bestsellers, Standing Up to the Madness, Static, and The Exception to the Rulers, with her brother, journalist David Goodman. For more information about Amy Goodman and Democracy Now!, please visit democracynow.org.

Denis Moynihan, since helping co-found Democracy Now! as an independent production company in 2002, has participated in the organization’s growth, focusing primarily on distribution, infrastructure development, and coordinating complex live broadcasts from all continents (save Antarctica). He lives in Denver, and is the founder of a new noncommercial, community radio station in Colorado’s high country.

Reviews

"Amy Goodman has taken investigative journalism to new heights of exciting, informative, and probing analysis."—Noam Chomsky

"You can learn more of the truth about Washington and the world from one week of Amy
Goodman's Democracy Now! than from a month of Sunday morning talk shows. Make that a year of Sunday talk shows. That's because Amy, as you will discover on every page of this book, knows the critical question for journalists is how close they are to the truth, not how close they are to power." -- Bill Moyers

"Amy Goodman is not afraid to speak truth to power. She does it every day." -- Susan Sarandon

"Pick up this book . . . and go raise some hell!" -- Michael Moore on The Exception to the Rulers

POST-NOV. 6, 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Published on Thursday, November 8, 2012 by TruthDig.com

Now the Work of Movements Begins by Amy Goodman

Source URL: http://www.commondreams.org/view/2012/11/08-9

The election is over, and President Barack Obama will continue as the 44th president of the United States. There will be much attention paid by the pundit class to the mechanics of the campaigns, to the techniques of micro-targeting potential voters, the effectiveness of get-out-the-vote efforts. The media analysts will fill the hours on the cable news networks, proffering post-election chestnuts about the accuracy of polls, or about either candidate’s success with one demographic or another. Missed by the mainstream media, but churning at the heart of our democracy, are social movements, movements without which President Obama would not have been re-elected.

President Obama is a former community organizer himself. What happens when the community organizer in chief becomes the commander in chief? Who does the community organizing then? Interestingly, he offered a suggestion when speaking at a small New Jersey campaign event when he was first running for president. Someone asked him what he would do about the Middle East. He answered with a story about the legendary 20th-century organizer A. Philip Randolph meeting with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Randolph described to FDR the condition of black people in America, the condition of working people. Reportedly, FDR listened intently, then replied: “I agree with everything you have said. Now, make me do it.” That was the message Obama repeated.

There you have it. Make him do it. You’ve got an invitation from the president himself.
For years during the Bush administration, people felt they were hitting their heads against a brick wall. With the first election of President Obama, the wall had become a door, but it was only open a crack. The question was, Would it be kicked open or slammed shut? That is not up to that one person in the White House, no matter how powerful. That is the work of movements.

Ben Jealous is a serious organizer with a long list of accomplishments, and a longer list of things to get done, as the president and CEO of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. 2013, he notes, is a year of significant anniversaries, among them the 150th anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, the 50th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington, as well as the 50th anniversaries of the assassination of Medgar Evers and the Birmingham, Ala., church bombing that killed four young African-American girls. President Obama’s 2013 Inauguration will occur on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Jealous told me on election night, as Mitt Romney was about to give his concession speech, “We have to stay in movement mode.”

Young immigrants are doing just that. Undocumented students, getting arrested in sit-ins in politicians’ offices, are the modern-day civil-rights movement. There are other vibrant movements as well, like Occupy Wall Street, like the fight for marriage equality, which won four out of four statewide initiatives on Election Day. In the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, and despite the enormous resources expended by the fossil-fuel industry to cloud the issue, climate change and what to do about it is now a topic that President Obama hints he will address, saying, in his victory address in election night, “Democracy in a nation of 300 million can be noisy and messy and complicated. ... We want our children to live in an America that isn’t burdened by debt, that isn’t weakened by inequality, that isn’t threatened by the destructive power of a warming planet.”

It was pressure from grass-roots activists protesting in front of the White House that pushed Obama to delay a decision on the controversial Keystone XL pipeline, proposed to run from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. More than 1,200 people were arrested at a series of protests at the White House one year ago. Now a group is blocking the construction of the southern leg of that pipeline, risking arrest and even injury, with direct-action blockades in tree-sits and tripods in Winnsboro, Texas, two hours east of Dallas.

When those who are used to having the president’s ear whisper their demands to him in the Oval Office, if he can’t point out the window and say, “If I do as you ask, they will storm the Bastille,” if there is no one out there, then he is in big trouble. That’s when he agrees with you. What about when he doesn’t?

The president of the United States is the most powerful person on Earth. But there is a force more powerful: People organized around this country, fighting for a more just, sustainable
world. Now the real work begins.

Denis Moynihan contributed research to this column.

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Amy Goodman is the host of "Democracy Now!," a daily international TV/radio news hour airing on 1,100 stations in North America. She was awarded the 2008 Right Livelihood Award, dubbed the “Alternative Nobel” prize, and received the award in the Swedish Parliament in December


Obama Won. Now It's Time to Change the System

Peter Dreier and Donald Cohen

November 14, 2012 | This article appeared in the December 3, 2012 edition of The Nation.
Despite President Obama’s important, even landmark, accomplishments, by the time November 6 arrived, many Americans were disappointed with his first term. They expected him to be a “transformational” president who would somehow, single-handedly, change Washington’s political culture. When their hopes were dashed, they blamed Obama rather than the corporate plutocrats’ stranglehold on Congress—especially (but not only) on the Republicans, who acted like sock puppets for the Chamber of Commerce, opposing every proposal to tax the wealthy and regulate corporations as a “job killer,” and insisting that their top priority was to make Obama a one-term president.

About the Author

Donald Cohen

Donald Cohen is executive director of the Center on Policy Initiatives, a San Diego-based research and policy center.

Peter Dreier

Peter Dreier is E.P. Clapp Distinguished Professor of Politics and chair of the Urban & Environmental Policy...

Also by the Author

Preparing for the Inevitable

The San Diego wildfires should prompt political candidates to address the fact that communities across America are ill-equipped to deal with natural and unnatural disasters.

Remembering Barry Commoner

Called the “Paul Revere of ecology,” Barry Commoner followed Rachel Carson as America’s most prominent modern environmentalist.

Today’s Social Justice Heroes
Let's celebrate a new generation of activists who challenge the powerful and mobilize the masses.

Peter Dreier

Given the power of the Chamber of Commerce, Wall Street banks, the insurance industry, the oil lobby and the drug companies, it's remarkable that Obama managed to enact the Affordable Care Act, the Dodd-Frank legislation, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, and tough new standards on fuel efficiency and electric plant emissions. Voters rewarded Obama with a second term and defeated many business-backed candidates and ballot measures, like California’s anti-union Proposition 32.

But the major contours of American politics remain intact. The nation’s extreme concentration of wealth still gives businesses and billionaires outsized political influence. Corporate campaign contributions and lobbyists tilt the political playing field so much that ordinary citizens often feel their votes and voices don’t count. The United States ranks number one in low voter turnout: even in this year’s hotly contested elections, fewer than 60 percent of eligible voters went to the polls. Paradoxically (but understandably), the people least likely to vote—the poor, the jobless, the young—are those who need government the most, and who, if they did vote, would tend to favor liberals and Democrats.

With re-election safely behind him, we hope Obama will be bolder in his second term. He should diversify his inner circle of economic advisers and cabinet appointees to include more progressive voices, not just those who reflect business and banking. He should use his bully pulpit to focus public attention on the disproportionate influence of the Chamber and other corporate lobbying groups. He should be willing to deflect their attacks, as FDR did when he said, “I welcome their hatred,” referring to the forces of “organized money.” We’d like to see more of the Barack Obama who showed up on December 6, 2011, at a high school in Osawatomie, Kansas, echoing the themes of the then– burgeoning Occupy Wall Street movement.

As he did during his 2008 campaign (but stopped doing once he took office), Obama should encourage the organizers and activists who are challenging corporate power, recognizing that their ability to agitate and mobilize ordinary Americans can help him be a more effective president. LBJ understood this inside-outside dynamic when he embraced the civil rights movement—adopting its “We shall overcome” motto in a 1965 speech to Congress—and took on the segregationists in his own party.

Americans would respond positively. In fact, a majority actually have liberal or progressive views. They think corporate money plays too big a role in our political system, the very rich pay too little in taxes, and the government should help with student loans, act to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and protect consumers and workers. They believe Congress should raise the minimum wage and that Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, unemployment insurance and food stamps are needed to protect people from economic hardship and insecurity.
But however skilled Obama is as a politician—and despite the many principled progressives in Congress—we cannot expect to enact more than modest reforms until we tame the power of the corporate plutocrats. Ultimately, we need to change the system that ensnares even the most progressive politicians in its web.

Specifically, we need three kinds of structural “mobilizing” reforms that will dramatically level the political playing field, weakening the power of the corporate plutocracy and strengthening the voices of ordinary Americans:

§ **Campaign finance reform.** America must eliminate the corrosive impact of money in politics. But until a more liberal Supreme Court reverses the conservative rulings that consider corporate money a form of “free speech” (such as *Buckley v. Valeo* and *Citizens United*), we need stepping-stone reforms that start to address this power imbalance.

Pending legislation called the Fair Elections Now Act would provide public funding to candidates who get support from large numbers of small donors instead of wealthy contributors, bundlers and lobbyists. The act’s lead sponsors in the House are Representatives John Larson, Walter Jones and Chellie Pingree; in the Senate it’s majority whip Dick Durbin.

A number of states have passed “clean election” laws to reduce the influence of private cash in favor of public funding, but courts have struck several of these down. In New York State, reform activists and Governor Andrew Cuomo are backing a public financing bill modeled after a successful law in New York City.

§ **Voting reform.** Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and Congressman John Lewis are sponsoring the Voter Empowerment Act, which would make voter registration easier, thus increasing voter turnout. It would make election day registration the law of the land. According to Demos, a nonpartisan think tank, election day registration currently exists in nine states, and voter turnout in these states has historically exceeded the turnout elsewhere by 10 to 12 percentage points. We should also turn election day into a national holiday and require accessible early voting in every state. No one should have to wait several hours to cast his or her vote.

§ **Labor law reform.** Throughout the last century, unions have been the most powerful vehicles for challenging corporate power. Organized labor was the primary force responsible for giving us Social Security, the minimum wage, the eight-hour day, unemployment insurance, workplace safety laws and funding for public education.

Today, however, only 11.8 percent of the workforce is unionized, even though more than half of all nonmanagement employees tell pollsters that they would like a union in their workplace. Many employers violate the law by firing or demoting workers who show support for union organizing drives. These employers get away with it because the penalties are too trivial to deter them. We need to update the labor laws and give workers a voice by setting real, deterrent-size penalties and enforceable remedies against employers who
violate their workers’ right to organize.

* * *

We can’t simply wait for these game-changing structural reforms to happen. In Obama’s second term, activists need to be bolder and more audacious, like the suffragists, strikers and civil rights crusaders before them. A central task for progressives is to expose the agenda of billionaires and plutocrats. We must name names and call out the business moguls whose overlapping memberships on corporate boards, lobbying groups and conservative think tanks make them a ruling class over the rest of us. Only visible, consistent action will create the political space—and pressure—for President Obama and Congress to act on behalf of the majority of Americans.

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This strategy worked in Obama’s first term. His healthcare proposal seemed likely to fail until activists began organizing protests at insurance companies and at the homes of industry CEOs, drawing attention to their outrageous profits and compensation, and giving voice to the victims of the industry’s abusive practices. The protests catalyzed media coverage, strengthened Obama’s resolve and pushed reluctant Democrats to vote for reform.

Activists must use protests, civil disobedience, boycotts, lawsuits and other strategies to pressure Congress to act on such urgent issues as foreclosures, underwater home prices, student debt, taxes, the fiscal crisis of states and cities, and raising the minimum wage. Each of these issues has broad support, workable policy solutions and burgeoning movements behind them.

As Frederick Douglass once said, without struggle there is no progress. But the efforts of issue-oriented movements would be far easier and far more effective if we could “change the system” that puts so many hurdles in the way of making our country a healthier democracy.

In last week’s issue, Norman Solomon described “How to Build a Grassroots Power Base.”

Peter Dreier and Donald Cohen

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Dick Bennett
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See Newsletters
Peace, Justice, Ecology Birthdays
See INMOTION
jbennet@uark.edu
(479) 442-4600
2582 Jimmie Ave.
Fayetteville, AR 72703