

## **ACTIVISM IS JUST A LITTLE THING, AND YOU CAN DO IT. HERE'S HOW**

Activism is characterized most by what it leaves aside as it effectively strives for power. That is analysis and rhetorical positioning. It is not about what someone thinks, but rather what one does. Activism is usually misconstrued by liberals, who tend to think in grand constructs. They oppose a war, object to world wide globalism, promote conserving the environment, and desire this or that form of government.

Saul Alinski, the master political agitator, tactical planner and social organizer didn't mince words when he wrote

*"Liberals in their meetings utter bold works; they strut, grimace belligerently, and then issue a weasel-worded statement 'which has tremendous implications, if read between the lines.' They sit calmly, dispassionately, studying the issue; judging both sides; they sit and still sit. ..."*

From their debating benches, liberals tend to view activism, of which they are little experienced first hand, in terms of their thinking in large designs. They make the same mistake as do their conservative enemies, whose uninformed grand design tendency causes them to see a great sinister ism or ist secretly guiding the activists.

To the contrary, activists, at least those who instigate organizing for meaningful change, know that the battles are about small goals that immediately affect those involved. They strive for such as neighborhood control of a local head start program in order that their children are educated rather than one run by social workers seeking increased salaries through federal funding. They protest to shut down a particular bank engaged in racially red lining its lending practices. They sit in an office in order to bring a campus to a halt because a teacher was unjustly fired. They picket to decrease the bottom line of a store with biased hiring practices. They jam and disrupt a city council meeting to prevent passage of a discriminatory ordinance.

People did not suffer blows marching over the Edmund Petis bridge in order to cause passage of a national right to vote law. They did it to bring normal operation of the small town of Selma, Alabama to a stand still and so force it to register black people to vote. To exactly the same ends but geographically removed, 1000 participants in SNCC and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party filled the jails of Jackson, Mississippi. They succeeded because local garbage collection was stopped and the city budget drained. The trucks had to be used instead for hauling demonstrators who then had to be fed with funds otherwise available for normal operation.

The great social changes that liberals seek take place when enough activists bring a halt to enough sectors of society which are then no longer able to continue operation in their previous modes. Those occur because of the establishment's attempt to maintain power by mollifying and co-opting the impetus for continued collective activism. In trying to halt the activism, the establishment is itself changed. And, the liberals, who analyzed,

postulated, and talked but did little, gather credit for the emergence of their ideas. That they do is of little concern to the activists, who go on to organize further.

Anyone can be an activist. It is easy. No great social or political insight or analysis is required. To the contrary, such focus is discouraged, for it only gets in the way. The following simple steps will allow anyone to start a local movement. I have personally used them to initiate formation of effective civil rights, anti-war, and antipoverty groups. The technique worked every time.

1. Identify about six persons who do not particularly know each other but share somewhat similar views to your own. Note letters to the editor. Start water cooler and/or after church discussions. Make statements in a class, club, or bar, and note responses. Don't discuss tactics, strategies, or solutions. Don't preach. Listen. Focus on those with intense feelings but avoid know-it-alls. Try to pick persons of divergent community status in so far as possible. Note how to contact them.
2. Meet separately, privately, and one time only with each of those you've identified. Invite them to your home or visit theirs. Go out to lunch or for drinks together. This time discuss your concerns in depth. Most importantly, listen to their views. Again, don't bring up organizing for action.
3. Arrange a meeting with the entire group together. Shut up. Let them talk. You will hear your own views presented to you as theirs. Agree with and reinforce those ideas, but don't expand them. Let them enjoy the shared feelings among new found friends. Keep things going until someone besides yourself suggests and the group agrees to meet again. Someone will, and they will. Have a place and time ready.
4. At the next meeting encourage the group to initiate some kind of visible public action that will attract more participants. It should be fun and not risky. Don't try to lead but just be one of the new movement. Enjoy!

As the group enlarges and engages in actions, it will take directions depending on the inclinations and experience of the members. Be one of them. If they don't go your way, or even if they do, go start another. Then bring them together. Repeat. That's what radical organizing and therefore democracy is all about.

Finally, one more quote from Aliniski, my favorite:

"Agitate + Antagonize + Educate + Organize".

Pocho