

Principles from recent experiences of the Poor organizing the Poor (6 Lessons*)

(6 Lessons from a Study of the Experiences of the Ghetto Uprisings of the 1960s, MLK's Poor People's Campaign, Black Panther Party, and the Homeless Union)

#1. One Estimate of the Situation (two bears—the grizzly or the teddy bear, two different strategies or sets of tactics). Educating, training, and uniting the newly emerging leaders of the poor and dispossessed on the basis of acquiring an accurate and ever developing **Estimate of the Situation** is indispensable to uniting and organizing a greater mass of people moving in one strategic direction.

#2. Two Strategic Principles:

- Building a broad movement to end poverty led by the poor as an organized force united across color lines (*"The Power of the Flea"* versus *"the Sleeping Giant"*).
- "You only get what you are organized to take"

The following words of wisdom speak in favor of two strategic principles:

Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

"At the banquet table of Nature there are no reserved seats, you get what you can take and you keep what you can hold. If you can't take anything, you won't get anything; and if you can't hold any thing, you won't keep anything. And you can't take anything without organization."

—A Philip Randolph

"Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow."

—Frederick Douglass

"The dispossessed of this nation—the poor, both white and Negro—live in a cruelly unjust society. They must organize . . . against the injustice, not against the lives of the persons who are their fellow citizens, but against the structures through which the society is refusing to take means which have been called for, and which are at hand, to lift the load of poverty. There are millions of poor people in this country who have very little, or even nothing, to lose. If they can be helped to take action together, they will do so with a freedom and a power that will be a new and unsettling force

in our complacent national life..."

--Martin Luther King, Jr. *Trumpet of Conscience* (1967)

"...whenever the slaves get together, something happens in Pharaoh's court, and he cannot hold the slaves in slavery. When the slaves get together, that's beginning of getting out of slavery. Now let us maintain unity"

--*A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*

"...One unfortunate thing about Black Power is that it gives priority to race precisely at a time when the impact of automation and other forces have made the economic question fundamental for blacks and whites alike. In this context a slogan 'Power for Poor People' would be much more appropriate than the slogan 'Black Power.'"

--Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here?* 1967

"History ha[s]...taught... it is not enough for people to be angry—the supreme task is to organize and unite people so that their anger becomes a transforming force."

--Martin Luther King, Jr., *Honoring Dr. Du Bois* (1968)

#3. Three I's that block unity, organizing, and movement building ("Slavery was first abolished in minds before in fact;" "Organizing is more than mobilizing bodies. It is essentially moving minds"*)

- **I'ism** vs **We'ism** ("Not I, I, me, me but us, us, we, we")
- **Ignorance** imitates, **Intelligence** initiates
- **"Identity politics"** put an emphasis on differences not on what the poor and dispossessed have in common

#4. Four Ex's of Education ("teach as we fight," "learn as we lead," "educate as we activate," and "talk as we walk!" are the main educational principles). The emphasis at the initial stages of development of the struggles is the development of leaders who are connected, clear, competent, and committed. **"Commitment not compensation"** with regard to the cause, clarity of vision, and related core values of a movement to end all poverty and human misery is the aim and foundation of this process of leaders development. This is largely an educational task.

- **Experiences** (history teaches. responsibility teaches. Every struggle, every fight provides a school for the development of consciousness)
- **Examples** ("you must be the change you want to see in the world." —Mahatma Gandhi; "actions speak louder than words.")

- **Excitations** (educating thru exposures, agitation and protests dramatizing and focusing attention on issues of poverty and social injustice)
- **Explanations** (especially evaluations of lessons learned from the other Ex's)

A major aim of Education is to have people and especially their newly emerging leaders to understand the complexity of the concentration of Wealth and the spread of poverty and the fundamental interconnection of issues and problems. They must come to see not simply the trees but also the ecosystem of the forest. They must come to understand what Martin Luther King, Jr. once said,

“We have moved from the era of civil rights to the era of human rights, an era where we are called upon to raise certain basic questions about the whole society. We have been in a reform movement... But after Selma and the voting rights bill, we moved into a new era, which must be the era of revolution. We must recognize that we can't solve our problem now until there is a radical redistribution of economic and political power... this means a revolution of values and other things. We must see now that the evils of racism, economic exploitation and militarism are all tied together... you can't really get rid of one without getting rid of the others... the whole structure of American life must be changed. America is a hypocritical nation. And (we) must put (our) own house in order.” -- May, 1967

#5. Five Ingredients of the poor organizing poor to building broad movement to end poverty (***“Baking the cake with none of the ingredients missing”***)

1. **Teams** – Teams of Indigenous Organizers (***“Mohammed must go to the Mountains”***): issue problems and nonissue problems— where we must start our educating and organizing work. Many forms of organization on many fronts of struggle)
2. **Base** – Base of Operations (places where the poor live and work or frequent on which we must establish firm footing of influence and organization)
3. **Voice** – every movement must have a voice to speak to itself and to the greater mass of the people (*Lines of Communication*). All forms of media available must be used especially the new and more accessible mass ‘many to many’ forms (i.e., those related to the internet). “Organizing is essentially bringing together all the scattered small voices into one big and powerful voice.
4. **Networks** – in building a movement each organizing efforts must develop connections and unity with other organizing efforts in networks of mutual support and united and sustained actions
5. **Cores** – Cores of Political Leaders are “like the sun around which the other 4 Ingredients revolve.” These cores consist of the leading and most committed elements of each of the networks and

organizations dealing with issues of poverty. They have the capability to educate and unite entire networks of organizations starting with emphasis on the fledgling groupings of the poor and to coordinate overall efforts to counter the ever escalating Netwar against the poor. To do so they must constitute themselves as a network of “nexuses”, that is, a network of leaders that ensures a common strategy to direct the connection and coordination between off-line organizing and on-line organizing.

History teaches that the first stage of building a broad social movement and the first step in building organization is the identification, development, and uniting of connected, clear, competent, and committed leaders. Uniting the poor as the leading social force of a broad social movement to abolish poverty is no easy task. It can only be done through uniting and educating (centrally but not exclusively) those leaders emerging from the ranks of the poor. Especially at the early stages, the measurement of a leader is how many of other leaders s/he develops. This finds expression in the slogans, ***“Each one teach one”*** and ***“the more you know the more owe.”*** In other words, being a teacher so as to constantly raise social and political consciousness is an indispensable quality of a leader. ***“You can’t for long lead someone who disagrees with you.”***

The content of that leadership development is at minimum the mastery of the **6 Lessons**. Leaders cannot be developed in a vacuum. They are educated and trained in the context of and in connection with all the other ingredients and major political and organizational factors. We have called this process ***“panning for gold.”*** ***“All that glitters is not gold.”***

#6. Six Panther Ps (*“playing the piano with all Ps in perfect melody”*)

1. **Programs** – Principles or points of unity (the basic needs and demands of the struggle including principles above)
2. **Protests** – Bringing attention and pressure to the issues and problems (“no business as usual”; “no housing, no healthcare, no living wage, no education, no justice, no peace!”)
3. **Projects of Survival** (e.g., Huey P. Newton called the Black Panthers’ Free Breakfast Programs for Children political “survival or community service programs” for “Self Defense” against the immediate acts and issues of oppression. When organizing poor people building institutions to deal with their immediate and daily needs are indispensable and builds trust and help secure **Bases of Operations**)

4. **Press Work** -- Independent *lines of communication* along with a strategy to deal with major media are indispensable to getting the proper message out, having the unheard heard.
5. **Political Education** -- "Organizing is more than mobilizing bodies. It is essentially moving minds."
6. **Plan not Personalities** -- The whole campaign of organizing must be carried out on the basis of plans that "play the piano with all the keys, all the Ps in perfect melody." The necessity of this principle is shown by a negative example in the Black Panther Party's experience. One of the contributing factors in the destruction of the Panthers was that the Powers That Be were able to use divisive tactics by exploiting the differences between factions within the group that tended to be organized around different personalities (See Huey P. Newton's "*War Against the Panthers.*")

NOTE: The **6 Panther Ps** are more of a set of tactical principles whose combined operations require at minimum the artful implementation of all the above considerations #1 thru #6. All 6 lessons lend themselves to network organizing. When taken inseparably and guided by an ongoing comprehensive **Estimate of the Situation** (lesson #1) they are given more efficiency and effectiveness when implemented in this new information age in accordance with the requirements of Netwar forms of struggle and the related Network forms of organization.

*The core concept running through all **6 lessons** is the following: *uniting and organizing a social group is about more than simply mobilizing bodies. It is essentially about moving minds.* This core concept and the ways its work itself out in the 6 lessons of the poor organizing the poor lend themselves more to the new 'many to many' principles of Netwar. In this new age of information technology, networking and Netwar embrace the core concept more effectively and efficiently than any of the past forms of conflict and organizing.