

NEON

SYSTEMIC CAMPAIGNS // READING // 2016

“The work of the political activist inevitably involves a certain tension between the requirement that positions be taken on current issues as they arise and the desire that one’s contributions will somehow survive the ravages of time.” Angela Davis

“Political life as a whole is an endless chain consisting of an infinite number of links. The whole art of politics lies in finding and taking as firm a grip as we can of the link that is least likely to be struck from our hands, the one that is most important at the given moment, the one that most of all guarantees its possessor the possession of the whole chain.” Lenin

It’s far too rare that we have the chance to examine strategy in depth. In this session we’ll be exploring what good strategy is, how we can ensure that our strategies are ‘systemic’ and how our different organising traditions create change and work together. Rather than thinking about strategy in the abstract, we’ll be working with the strategies we use in our own organising work in the session.

To help ground the reading in some key concepts, here are a few definitions we’ve found useful:

Power: the ability to act and to bring pressure to bear for a cause or end.

Theory of change: what you believe are the necessary conditions – both those you can influence but also those you can’t – that will determine if and how you can win the change you want.

Strategy: in the words of Marshall Ganz: “Strategy is turning the resources you have into the power you need, to win the change you want.”

Tactics: the individual actions you take to fulfill your strategy, for example a strike or boycott (NB: this is often confused with strategy).

Please note that this reading list is usually accompanied by training session(s) but we thought it would be useful to provide it for those wanting to do their own reading.

ESSENTIAL:

Don't Give Up, Howard Zinn (Video):

bit.ly/1wSXsUp

How Change Happens, Angela Davis (reflections on struggles in the US – Video):

bit.ly/1zGGJpH

Organizing Notes: Strategising, Marshall Ganz (the basics of strategy and power relations):

bit.ly/2bV1cCr

Organizing Cools the Planet:

bit.ly/1y6WD98

Purpose, Vision, Strategy: Notes from Movement Strategy Centre (read through p15-17 for some good reflective questions to ask your campaign ahead of session):

bit.ly/2bG9j7r

Five Lessons from The Past and Present of Racial Justice Organising:

bit.ly/2bFPFns

OPTIONAL*:

The Environmental Justice Network (This is a collection of articles and tools that are great for thinking through how to approach your campaigns from an intersectional perspective, to deconstruct long standing oppressions. The focus is environmental, but there are subsections on class, race, legal issues and organising principles - pick and choose based on your needs/interests): bit.ly/2bViywG

America's Hedge Clippers campaign traces how cash flows out of poor communities via hedge funds, Paul Mason (He thinks we should adopt similar campaigns strategies in the UK):

bit.ly/2c589il

***But seriously worth it!**

BOOKS FOR FUTURE REFERENCE

Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, Taylor Branch (the incredible story of how the boycott actually came about): bit.ly/2e7M9ZH

Raising Expectations (and Raising Hell): My Decade Fighting for the Labor Movement, Jane McAlevey (US union organiser Jane McAlevey on the shortcomings of tactics that don't build popular power): bit.ly/2dnoJOg

Rules for Radicals, Saul Alinsky: bit.ly/2dA79oK

This reading list is the end result of a lot collective thinking and practice. NEON and Teju Adeleye led the synthesis of these insights to create the reading list, with the support of the Public Interest Research Centre (PIRC). PIRC designed the reading list and made it beautiful.