

99risefinal

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Soneile Hymn: [00:00:01] This is a series on direct action from the Metta Center for Nonviolence where you'll hear some of the most creative and innovative ways that practitioners have used and theorists have thought about nonviolent direct action.

Kai: [00:00:15] The vision of the Californian March for Democracy, as we call it is, is we wanted to do something that could speak to this moment in our country when I think it's become abundantly crystal clear that we're not really living in a democracy anymore where we're really living in a plutocracy where [unintelligible 00:00:35], an oligarchy where a tiny group of people among the most wealthy are really exercising a profound level of control over our government and over our society. [00:00:44] This is a corruption of the way that our government, our democracy is supposed to work and it's leading to all kinds of suffering, all kinds of ways in which the needs of the vast majority of people in our country are not really being heard, are not really being heeded. So what we want to do with this march is to bring to bear the power of nonviolence to not just create awareness, but activate and inspire people. [00:01:09] and that by making the collective sacrifice of marching such a great distance, 480 miles over the mountains, across the valley, through the heat of the Central Valley, from LA to Sacramento, that we can lose people who agree with us and inspire them by our sacrifice, our courage, our commitment to feel a sense of hope and question and to realize that they have this real power to contribute too.

[00:01:35] Music.

Kai: [00:01:48] There's some slim possibility that if there's enough of – enough attention the march as it begins and builds over the course of the next 37 days, that our leaders will act before we get to Sacramento. But if they haven't done that, then we're going to continue and beat them with sacrifice and make the commitment that we're going to stay there at the capitol non-violently insisting that they take leadership on this. Willing to [unintelligible 00:02:11] if necessary to press the issue further to try to shine sort of spotlight on this and create a stage in which our leaders have the opportunity to step up and take leadership on this issue. Myself and some of the other founders of 99 Rise, Paul Angler, Paulina Gonzales and some of the folks that were younger and really came in through the occupy movement. [00:02:35] We've all had experiences of seeing how the power of mass nonviolent action can be really hamstrung –and especially movements can be really tripped up and grievously harmed by breakdowns in nonviolent discipline when people can take nonviolent action. [00:02:50] I talked about my [unintelligible 00:02:53] and the power of mass nonviolent action in Seattle, that was also my introduction into how even a small group of

tiny minority within this little movement doing violent action whether, you know, speaking to fight the cops or destroy property – which is [unintelligible 00:03:06] to be violent – how that could have such a negative impact on the dynamic of trying to gain popular support and bring more and more participation into the movement. [00:03:15] I've seen that crop up in the immigrant rights movement here in LA. At times, there would be really high momentum and it was, I think, part of what really undermined the Occupy Movement and really just took the momentum down. [00:03:28] So for us, you know, we talk about, in our movement, that this is, in many ways, would be our greatest challenge to maintain nonviolent discipline. And we're trying to build a decentralized movement wherein we can encode certain principles or what we call DNA – sort of the body of the movement. [00:03:43] So that we don't have to rely just on a centralized leadership to try to maintain nonviolent discipline like Cesar Chavez or Gandhi who, you know, was fast around that. That we want to try to create sort of antibodies to maintain nonviolence throughout the movement.

[00:03:56] Music.

Kai: [00:04:09] So part of our way of initiating people into the culture and DNA of the movement in general is these trainings, these mass trainings that we do for groups people who want to join our movement. And we have focused on that – not only had a nonviolent movement worked strategically, but understanding that nonviolence is essential to that whole process, how do we maintain nonviolent discipline? [00:04:29] And we have what we call four lines of defence for that. The first is that we make an explicit principle within our organization. So we have ten principles that are sort of the governing force within 99 Rise and one of those is nonviolent gift and nonviolent action. [00:04:45] So take it or leave it. If you want to be part of things, you have to embrace that. The second line [unintelligible 00:04:50] is that we train. We do training for everybody. So everybody comes into the organization to be trained. Part of what they get trained on is nonviolent discipline. And so there's that expectation that we have a collective responsibility to maintain that. [00:05:02] The third line of defence is creating action agreements and doing proactive engagement. So if we're going to do something with people that aren't explicitly part of 99 Rise as a coalition, we want an agreement explicitly for nonviolent discipline for that action. [00:05:15] If there are any folks that we know of in the community that might not be down with that, they're advocating to pursue tactics that might come and do violent action, we want to proactively reach out to engage them to try to prevent that, to get them to agree to the agreement that the group has made and be accountable to that or not participate. [00:05:31] And then the final line of defence is intervention, which is to always have people that are trained as nonviolent monitors at our actions. Everybody has a collective responsibility to do that, but we're going to have some people who's specific focus – the only thing that they're concerned about at that action is paying attention to that and intervening if it looks like

something might happen and leveraging the power of everyone else who's been trained. [00:05:54] There's still a lot of questions to figure out about how we can do decentralized nonviolent movements, sort of 21st century style which has been sort of the common dynamics through the [unintelligible 00:06:08] revolution and the Arab Spring and a lot of effect on Europe and United States. How can we do them in a way that we're able to sustain them until we reach victory and really translate that into some more lasting organization. [00:06:24] In terms of the particular struggle that we're in, the question we're trying to answer is how to create a deep and fierce sense of moral political urgency and people in our country who we know are passive allies to our struggles and the corruption of your democracy, but are not taking action in a way that will create the political conditions in which reform is not only possible, but inevitable. [00:06:47] That's, I think, the sort of nut that we're trying to crack. And my faith, my hope is that if we – if that, you know, with nonviolent direct action, we can do that by people making deeper sacrifices around the basic moral issue and disrupting business as usual with moral high ground, that that can create that effect and we just have to do enough experiments until we hit the right note.

[00:07:09] Music.

Kai: [00:07:16] So that's my faith. Where this is an experiment – this march is an experiment seeing if we can just create that effect because once we do, there's a giant of folks across the country who believe in what we're fighting for and if we can wait and activate those folks, I think we can then change much sooner than most people would believe.

Soniele Hymn: [00:07:37] You have been listening to a special series on direct action from the Metta Center for Nonviolence. To listen to other podcasts and to get more information on nonviolence, visit www.mettacenter.org.

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