

REMAKING AMERICAN DEMOCRACY II: A Groundplan for the Demos to Gain Public Powers

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It is the absence of public space, the most fundamental and critical fact of social life in coming decades, that must underpin the agenda of grassroots organizing. There is a continuing and catastrophic loss of liberty to act politically, huge numbers of people without opportunities for contributing to their own public good. In time this may become the most compelling challenge to collective life, and thus the basis for social movement and grassroots organizing. This is an idea that leaps beyond organizations that win concessions; it envisions vitalizing and shaping an historic movement, institutionalizing the full citizenry as a permanent partner in the country's political-economic decision-making. —Moshe ben Asher, Introduction to 1980 Ph.D. dissertation

The content of this article should really be the work notes of a handful of leader-organizers who believe the American commonwealth requires that the people at large, the demos, have some permanent, direct control of *public powers*, the powers usually reserved to their governments. As professor and organizer Tim Sampson (1935-2001) quipped back in the 1970s, “Sure, we want public ownership—public ownership of government!” This is a proposition whose essentials we have advocated in several *Social Policy* articles* in recent years.

We remain devoted to this proposition because the potential for misuse of the public powers by elected officials exists not as a “bug” but a money-connived “feature” of sham representative government—which explains why so many self-serving climbers flock to it and take personal advantage of it. But anchoring governance in some direct control of the public powers by the demos, empowering the will of each citizen with equal political authority, potentially limits the concentration and misuse of those powers for special interests, and instead intensifies demands for the commonwealth.

* See: “Remaking American Democracy I: Kick-Starting the Public Powers and Power-Leverage of Popular Assemblies 2.1” (2022); “Community Organizing Response to the Fascist Oligarchy of the Billionaire Brotherhood” (2021); “Moral-Spiritual Infrastructure: Touchstone of Movement-Building Community Organizing” (2020); “Winning the War for Grassroots Empowerment: Benefits of Building a Public Powers Movement” (2017); “Directly Democratic Metropolitan Government: Envisioning Beyond Oppression, Rebellion, and Reform” (2016); and “Public Powers for the Commonwealth: A Challenge to Faith-Based Organizing” (2015).

Who's going to do it, and how?

Who might be the leader-organizers to organize *public powers for the people*, and how might they go about it?

Sadly, the handful of candidates we knew and organized with decades ago have passed away or, like us, have grown old. Despite these limitations, we determined to propose a project model to organize public powers for the people, one which could be used in virtually any urban city. It could, we reasoned, prove useful to city-dwellers inspired to democratize the governance of their city by establishing directly democratic, empowered neighborhood popular assemblies—and, in so doing, help to build a movement to remake American democracy.

If a small group of leader-organizers gather in a city to launch a project to establish such popular assemblies throughout the city, what should the groundplan look like? What will make sense now, given what we know about the base-building (one-to-one, face-to-face) community organizing (CO) already going on in the country?

We should acknowledge, first, that, despite the CO movement's alliances, federations, and coalitions, and more than half a century of building “people power” for the commonwealth, those efforts remain largely an *unorganized* movement. They have not presented a front united in leadership and strategic vision. They have not inspired a popular movement of grassroots empowerment. If community organizing is to meet the historic challenge of our era, to remake American democracy so that it lives on for our children and our children's children, it must remedy those shortcomings and innovate new approaches. It must also incorporate the lessons of

the past, building on the work of the last half-century.

History teaches us that assembling a unified community organizing movement to fulfill our vision of an empowered demos will require much more than scattered grassroots power-building. It will require, first and foremost, a widely shared strategic moral vision. For such a vision is prerequisite to the rebuilding of moral and ethical communities in which trust and mutuality thrive, in which there is a commitment to the flourishing of all lives. Such a vision can direct us on a path not only of enlightened participatory politics and public administration but of moral-spiritual goodness, the absence of which has stunted the growth of community organizing as a popular movement (which we wrote about in “Moral-Spiritual Infrastructure: Touchstone of Movement-Building Community Organizing”). And last, but certainly not least, such a vision must inspire the unflagging faith and hope of both the organizers and the organized, who may be called upon to make sacrifices for decades.

The groundplan we propose here represents more than an ideal. It outlines a theoretically feasible how-to guide for the acquisition of public powers. It represents a significant departure from the standard faith-based and neighborhood organizing models in its particulars: in its governance, funding, replicable organizational units, action life, and overall objectives. So, like all things that have never been done before, the plan must be theoretical at the outset. However, as much as it embodies a new strategy and forms of organization unfamiliar to mainstream community organizing, what we propose here relies on the history, knowledge, and skill-base of the profession.

There will, of course, be many questions. We will answer only a few of them here, since many have been addressed in previous articles of ours, to which we refer the reader. The biggest question is: Do we expect this groundplan to transform urban governance in America by establishing directly democratic neighborhood popular assemblies with public powers? Perhaps, but not in our lifetimes or in its present form. As German military strategist Helmuth von Moltke (1800-1891) said, “No plan survives contact with the enemy.” And attempts by the citizenry to gain public powers directly will have countless enemies. We believe, however, that the ultimate objective, *public powers for the people*, will endure because they are indispensable. In the absence of some direct control of those powers by the people at large, representative democracy and the commonweal have become imperiled.

So we’re asking, as Hillel did two thousand years ago, “If not us, who? And if not now, when?”

What are the essential elements of a public powers groundplan?

For the demos to gain public powers—specifically, direct control of government powers, sans representatives—a structural transformation of governance will obviously need to take place. It should begin with the

government most accessible to the people, the municipality. Such transformation may realistically be regarded as a multi-decade objective, which, for some, renders the entire enterprise “unbelievable.” And yet, a multi-decade movement to remake urban municipal government is very much known to us.

The early twentieth century “municipal reform movement” (which we wrote about in “Directly Democratic Metropolitan Government: Envisioning Beyond Oppression, Rebellion, and Reform”) brought about a major democracy-*debilitating* restructuring of municipal government nationally. Equality, equity, accessibility, and accountability for the sake of the commonweal were disavowed in favor of promised but rarely delivered efficiency, effectiveness, and economy. Unsurprisingly, at that time the impetus and sponsorship—the legitimization and funding of the “reform”—came from the owners of capital wealth. The movement was introduced over several decades, city by city, through replicable “municipal reform bureaus,” whose policy recommendations were heavily weighted to top-down, elite exploitation of local government powers and resources—a practice which has continued to this day.

Our plan is no less ambitious than theirs. It promotes replicable projects to help advance a democracy-*rehabilitating* movement, aimed to reassert citizen control of government powers, legitimized and financed from the bottom up. Given the challenges involved, we believe that a groundplan for public powers organizing—to remake the governance of a city by creating a lower tier of legally empowered neighborhood popular assemblies—will have better prospects for success if it includes the following:

1. A strategic moral vision that serves as the touchstone of all project activity, from initial formation to legal establishment of multiple popular assemblies in the city.
2. A project model replicable in a wide range of urban cities, one which: (a) addresses the chronic funding and staffing shortages of standard base-building community organizing; (b) incorporates stages of development, with estimated times to completion; and (c) is fully realizable in a single city within a specified timeframe (say ten years or less from startup, as proposed here).
3. Staged project funding based on multiple sources, including: (a) crowdfunding; (b) foundations and individual donors; (c) enrollments of neighborhood residents as trustees of the project’s nonprofit, tax-exempt community foundation directorate; (d) fees and taxes self-levied by the popular assemblies; and (e) intergovernmental fund transfers to the assemblies.
4. An organizational arm to recruit, educate, and train public powers community organizers, such as this groundplan’s proposed Institute for Community Development and Empowerment, to ensure a dedicated, professionally qualified cadre of organizers, with additional preparation as strategic moral visionaries and public powers tacticians.

5. An organizing plan for the civics education of neighborhood residents, carried out initially by canvass-educators, describing the substance of the project in their city and the essentials of the public powers strategic moral vision. This would transition to the canvass-organizing of Education Outreach Committees of residents, who would themselves conduct civics education housemeetings (with backup by field staff) throughout their neighborhoods. All the above should lead to committed neighborhood and citywide support of a ballot initiative that will modify the city charter to authorize the formation of directly democratic popular assemblies with public powers.
6. An organizing plan for the formation of a citywide association to author and coordinate the ballot initiative campaign and, subsequently, to coordinate the ongoing unified activities of the assemblies. The formation of the association is contingent upon having in place multiple Education Outreach Committees, the designated representatives of which will constitute the membership of the association.

The entire undertaking, to be known as “Remaking Democracy in [name of city]: A Public Powers for the People Project,” would be launched as a demonstration project.

How might it work practically?

A Strategic Moral Vision that Serves as the Touchstone of all Project Activity

Self-interest may work as a relatively short-term driver of social action, but by itself it does not provide the deep, abiding inspiration and vision needed for continuously expanding, unified movements that demand commitment over decades.

To take up a struggle against overwhelming odds, no matter the cause, requires more than a fact-based, well-thought-out plan, because much of what happens in such an undertaking is out of our control. Mistakes and setbacks are inevitable. It takes faith, whatever the source, to believe that greater goodness will emerge in the world if, despite our losses, we do all within our power for the sake of the commonweal.

To sustain our faith and hope, we must rouse an inspiring moral vision of the commonweal we want for ourselves and future generations. We must describe a future of goodness, fulfillment and contentment, as well as the sacrifices that will be required to bring it about. This moral dimension lays the foundation for the movement’s boundaries of desirable and acceptable behavior, such as treating opponents with respect and humanity and remaining civil despite disappointment or insult.

The moral vision also serves to lay a foundation for responsible citizenship: for righteousness is the foundation of truth; truth is the foundation of justice; justice is the foundation of freedom; freedom is the foundation of peace; and peace is the foundation of compassion. These values are shared teachings of the Abrahamitic

religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—which are the principal faith traditions of the American people. Even when we Americans no longer believe in or formally follow these traditions, we often retain an attachment to their values. When we ignore them, our self-worth and self-confidence shrivel, and we shrink from civic responsibility. When we stand up for these residuals of faith, our sense of self-worth and self-confidence expand, priming us for energetic citizenship.

And when we stand up, we influence others. As Samson Raphael Hirsch comments on Isaiah (58:12), “From the example of your activities, your contemporaries will derive courage and enthusiasm, from you they will get the strength to build up that which seemed never to have been built up and never to be built up, and your activities will lay the foundation on which even the very last generation will build on and on.”

A Project Model Replicable in a Wide Range of Urban Cities

How might our model compare to the urban community organizing we have known over the last half a century? The standard base-building, neighborhood-based and faith-based CO models, which exist formally as tax-exempt, nonprofit, public-benefit corporations (often bringing together their members in informal citywide steering committees to mount campaigns), have chronically suffered weaknesses. Their long-term funding, for example, is often in doubt, forcing staff to spend inordinate amounts of time fundraising from top-down sources. The long-term commitment of their top-notch professional staff is also often in question. And regarding their membership continuity, they’re not so continuous. These shortcomings typically result in a plateauing of growth; in the failure to attract and hold well-educated and trained organizers committed to organizing as a professional career; and in the need to repeatedly reorganize local units because of membership turnover and loss. Consequently, the existing individual units within projects, which exercise their power through issue-driven mobilizations, wax and wane over time; as does the ability of their projects to mount accelerating citywide, regional, statewide, and national campaigns.

We view the fundamental tasks of community organizing as building community, building organization, building mobilization, building movement, and building institution. It’s no secret that the profession of organizing has largely ignored the first and the last two of these tasks. As a result, it is often stunted by the lack of relationships that make up the connective tissue of empowered community and by the lack of movement-won institutional power needed to countervail the multiple institutions aligned against the commonweal.

The groundplan we’re proposing, however, encompasses community-building, movement-building, and institution-building. Our initial organizing process does not aim primarily to dig issues for immediately unifying action. Instead, we begin by building relationships around neighbors’ mutually defined burdens and around their hopes and dreams for their neighborhood

in the context of their expressed values and faith. This may well prompt the desire for immediate social action; but in our groundplan the first step on the pathway towards social action is civics education with the goal of inspiring participation in public powers organizing. Thus the energy for such action leads to the building of a movement which, first, can bring about the institutionalized empowerment of their neighborhood; within a decade, the democratizing transformation of their city's governance; and, ultimately, the remaking of American democracy.

In this model, residents do not "join" by becoming members of an action organization but instead enroll as contributing trustees of their city's Neighborhood Empowerment Community Foundation. The Foundation is understood to be the heart of the citywide project. It will (a) fund and oversee the citywide Institute for Community Development and Empowerment to recruit, educate and train the project's field staff; (b) launch citywide neighborhood public powers civics education and development activities in multiple neighborhoods; and (c) place and supervise the citywide field staff who will serve those neighborhoods, bringing them together in the ballot initiative campaign to authorize the establishment and empowerment of popular assemblies as municipal subdivisions through "reform" of the city's charter.

This model of public powers organizing begins with the formation of a Community Foundation Trustee Commission that does the groundwork to establish the Neighborhood Empowerment Community Foundation and, afterwards, continues as an advisory body to the Foundation. The Trustee Commission will come to include every resident who subsequently chooses to enroll as a permanent trustee contributor to the Foundation. The trustee contributors will advise the Foundation board of directors, providing direct feedback from the neighborhoods, and they will nominate and elect members to the board. (The attached project schematic may help clarify these relationships.) The Community Foundation itself will operate a tax-deductible, check-off contributions system in which the enrollment of new trustees will include a default option for annual trustee-contributor renewal. In other words, the residents of the neighborhoods themselves will pay for and become the trustees and board members of the Neighborhood Empowerment Community Foundation that has overall responsibility and authority for the project in their city.

This project model has four phases of development (shown graphically in the accompanying schematic): *Phase One*—formation of the Community Foundation Trustee Commission by the founding leader-organizers of the project, and the Commission's establishment of the Neighborhood Empowerment Community Foundation to serve as the legal, financial, managerial, and public face of the project; *Phase Two*—establishment by the Foundation of the Institute for Community Development and Empowerment to recruit, educate, and train public powers field staff within the project; *Phase Three*—launching by the Foundation-supervised field

staff of a Civics Education Outreach Program and organizing of multiple Education Outreach Committees of residents simultaneously in 20 targeted neighborhoods; and *Phase Four*—formation by the Education Outreach Committees of a citywide Association of Popular Assemblies, to plan and coordinate a ballot-initiative city charter "reform" campaign; to be followed by the organizing of petition drives in multiple neighborhoods by Education Outreach Committees to formally establish individual popular assemblies with public powers.

The tasks entailed and the timing of each phase can be estimated for any city. Although we have not included estimated times here, we have roughly approximated the time required based on our own experience of neighborhood and faith-based organizing, both in projects we have launched and in those which were ongoing before our employment, which included organizing in neighborhoods, parishes and congregations, and in citywide and countywide arenas. Our conclusion is that once a qualified Community Foundation Trustee Commission has been formed, completion of the final phase in 20 neighborhoods—democratizing the governance of one city—is feasible well within ten years.

Staged Project Funding Based on Multiple Sources

The commitments and contacts of the founding members of the Community Foundation Trustee Commission will be essential to the success of the project. They will be asked by the leader-organizers of the project to serve as gatekeepers and legitimizers, to identify and contact potential Neighborhood Empowerment Community Foundation board directors, funders, and specialists who might be willing to support the project. They will thereby lay the groundwork for the Foundation.

Once the initial Community Foundation Trustee Commission members have been recruited by the leader-organizers of the project, the groundplan proposes five funding stages.

In stage one, crowdfunding will be used to launch the project. It may be publicized as "A Project to Democratize America—City by City," through the establishment, by ballot initiatives, of directly democratic popular assemblies, thus giving every citizen an empowered role in governing their city and the means to hold higher-level government officials accountable. Founding Trustee Commission members will be relied upon to initiate the crowdfunding. As suggested above, this income will be used by the Trustee Commission to launch the Neighborhood Empowerment Community Foundation, which will be the heart of the project.

In stage two, the Community Foundation, a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation, will request funding from foundations and wealthy donors as temporary support to cover the first three years' costs of recruiting, educating, training, and initially supervising 20 public powers community organizers. Initial proposals to foundations and individual donors should emphasize "Remaking American Democracy: Public Powers for the People" as a demonstration project, replicable in

most urban cities. The aim of the project, as presented to these funders, will be to enlist the help of community organizing in remaking American democracy by kick-starting the public powers of popular assemblies to create directly democratic urban government.

In stage three, the project will rely on enrollment of Community Foundation trustees to produce income via field staff one-to-one contacts and check-off contribution authorizations. This will cover the costs of organizing the Civics Education Outreach Program, the Education Outreach Committees of neighborhood residents, the formation of the citywide Association of Popular Assemblies, and the individual petition drives to establish each of the neighborhood popular assemblies.

The actively promoted culture of the project will include the expectation that every resident of a targeted neighborhood who supports the project will become a permanent trustee of the Community Foundation Trustee Commission (to include full voting rights after the first year of membership). As the civics education process gathers momentum, Education Outreach Committee members and others they contact will become an increasing source of Community Foundation trustee enrollments, providing income to the field staff and the Institute for Community Development and Empowerment. The Trustee Commission members will nominate and elect the members of the Neighborhood Empowerment Community Foundation board of directors (following the terms of the founding directors). In other words, the citizenry at large, those who pay the freight, will set the direction of the train. By the third year of field organizing, when foundation and individual donor funding for the Institute for Community Development and Empowerment ends, it is expected that new and automatically renewing trustee contributions to the Community Foundation will generate sufficient revenue for the salaries of both full-time organizers and Institute staff.

In stage four, a neighborhood popular assembly, once legally established, could derive revenue from self-assessed fees and taxes, which will produce income via assembly authorization of specific programs and services. These might include: a low-cost option to install solar panels; a low-cost walk-in, neighborhood medical clinic staffed by a nurse-practitioner to do initial diagnosis, treatment of minor ailments, referral to higher levels of care, and on-site health education; a low-cost Internet connection and cable-TV service; a neighborhood-run public safety program to deal with domestic disputes, mental health referrals, traffic control, etc.; and a low-cost neighborhood mediation service to resolve disputes between neighbors and between them and various organizations.

In stage five, the neighborhood popular assemblies, acting together, could derive revenue from negotiated intergovernmental transfers. They could, for example, provide some of their own public safety services or their own health care services, with some or all the costs reimbursed by the city and county that presently have responsibility for them.

An Organizational Arm to Recruit, Educate, and Train Public Powers Community Organizers

A public powers project to democratize an urban city government cannot succeed by hiring organizers who are already trained and experienced and willing to make a long-term commitment to public powers organizing, because right now there aren't any. Moreover, even if we were talking about organizers in the tradition of CO in this country, there just aren't enough of them to go around. A small number of experienced organizers might be recruited, however, as instructors and supervisors.

Our groundplan proposes organizing an Institute for Community Empowerment and Development, offering graduating university students a professional-level education and training certification program, with a stipend. We believe many will respond to the opportunity to work professionally to remake the structure of American democracy.

Professional education (in contrast to training) for public powers organizing goes beyond the teaching of basic principles, methodologies, and lessons from past actions, campaigns, negotiations, etc. Our experience is that "recipe knowledge" (set solutions to familiar problems) rarely manages to deal with the ever-changing organizing field of action. Thus, professional education should reach beyond the standard training to incorporate the study of history, social movements, biography, national development, democratic government, public administration, and unified practice theory. A professional education in public powers organizing should inculcate analytical, conceptual, and creative thinking in problem-solving to meet changing conditions and the unknown challenges they present. It should also lead to strategic and tactical competence to apply available resources.

Recruitment of students could rely upon job postings: by college and university political science, sociology, and social work departments, by student job placement centers, and by student newspapers, especially at nearby schools. Juniors one year from expected graduation would be targeted with notices announcing subsidized part-time professional education and job placement in the "professional field of public powers community organizing and national development," to be available at the end of the next academic year. Postings would also be submitted to national job boards under the job titles: community organizing, community change, social change, social strategy, macro social work, national development, etc.

Respondents might be asked to read a briefing paper and to submit a 15 to 20-minute video "application" that includes: a statement of their interest in social change and their relevant background, a description of their most important relationships and why they value them, their definition of leadership, their preferences for living and working conditions, and their answers to the following questions: What do they hope to accomplish in their professional life? Why do they think the profession of public powers community organizing and

national development might be the right career for them? Prospective candidates would be interviewed using FaceTime or the equivalent where in-person interviews are not possible.

Establishing such an institute may sound extraordinarily demanding. However, much of the curriculum and distance-teaching technology have already been developed. Further, initial and ongoing funding may be less challenging than it has been for CO, because many of the caveats related to top-down funding may not apply. Funding education and training, for example, implicitly precludes demands of funders for immediate campaign “wins.” Also, the usual sources of support for community organizing have never been asked to fund professional-level education (including job placement) that puts graduating college and university students on a lifelong career path in public powers community organizing and national development. Some funders may welcome the opportunity.

With the initial funding for three FTE positions and student stipends secured, it should be possible to recruit a part-time faculty consisting of former organizers with teaching experience and two dozen students for the first class.

Such an education and training institute could use a standard distance-teaching model of independent, paired-student, and small-group evening study. It would be based on reading and problem-exercise materials posted online and supplemented by once-a-week evening in-person or video-conferencing seminars.

This program could be undertaken by motivated students holding other full-time, low-demand employment for the first six months of formal instruction. During months seven, eight, and nine, students would gain field experience in *canvass-educating*, learning about the residents of their targeted neighborhood, initiating relationships, and introducing the citywide public powers organizing project and its strategic moral vision. During these first nine months, students would receive a foundation-funded stipend. In addition, during months seven, eight, and nine, students would raise a part of their income by enrolling residents as trustees of the Neighborhood Empowerment Community Foundation. During months 10 through 12, they would gain field experience in *canvass-organizing*, forming Education Outreach Committees of neighborhood residents who would have primary responsibility for educating their fellow residents in anticipation of an empowering ballot initiative. At this stage, students would raise all their income by enrolling Foundation trustees, many of whom had been referred for enrollment by Education Outreach Committee members.

An Organizing Plan for the Civics Education of Neighborhood Residents

The Civics Education Outreach Program would begin with student *canvass-educators* contacting residents of a targeted neighborhood, as described above (during months seven to nine). Their credential would be the recognized names and/or organizational affiliations of

the founding Trustee Commission members or Community Foundation board members. As noted above, the organizers would introduce the residents to the Neighborhood Empowerment Community Foundation, its strategic moral vision and its organizing strategy for public powers. We expect that a small number of residents would enroll as trustees at this point.

During months 10 to 12, students would begin *canvass-organizing*. They would contact neighborhood residents and make callbacks to their initial canvass-education contacts to form Education Outreach Committees; this in anticipation of conducting a neighborhood-wide civics education program. The program would rely primarily on housemeetings. The student canvass-organizers would initially conduct the housemeetings with their Education Outreach Committee members.

The content of the housemeetings would include much of what is basic to any initial CO one-to-one contact. The housemeeting agenda would also resemble typical faith-based organizing workshops, to include the following: residents’ experience of family and community life in the city, their concerns for their children’s future and their own; their appraisal of their experience in relation to their moral and spiritual values (which may not be religious per se); their hopes and dreams for the world and the life they want for their children and themselves; and their experience of powerlessness in trying to attain those hopes and dreams.

Finally, the housemeetings would include what will help them to build that power, such as finding common cause with others with whom they may or may not share political values and principles but with whom they can nonetheless find their commonweal and work to secure it. Building this power is the strategic moral vision of the project, realized by the public powers organizing process, concluding with a ballot initiative to reform the city charter that will establish empowered neighborhood popular assemblies.

These housemeetings would model the essential features of those that Committee members themselves will later conduct. They would be supported at that point by the students who then would be working as full-time organizers. As Education Outreach Committee members’ competence and confidence grows, many would conduct the educational housemeetings on their own. Some residents who attend these housemeetings would enroll as trustees of the project.

Residents who become trustees will, in effect, be supporting their own self-interest by creating an empowered popular assembly to work for their neighborhood. And that assembly would become part of a tier of self-governing neighborhoods that would share in the exercise of municipal public powers, such as zoning and public safety. We expect that other city residents, in the hope that their neighborhoods will be selected for neighborhood public powers organizing, would also enroll as trustees of the Community Foundation. Finally, all these efforts would begin the process of building a national movement of public powers for the people to

remake American democracy.

An Organizing Plan to Form a Citywide Association to Author and Support the Ballot Initiative

Once Education Outreach Committee housemeetings are well underway, confirming support for the project in each of the city's 20 initially targeted neighborhoods (which should happen simultaneously), the Committees will form a voluntary citywide Association of Popular Assemblies, with each neighborhood designating two of its committee members to represent them in the Association. The Association would plan and coordinate a ballot-initiative city charter "reform" campaign; to be followed by the organizing of petition drives in multiple neighborhoods, spearheaded by the Committees, to formally establish individual popular assemblies with public powers as sub-divisions of the municipality.

At the outset, the most challenging tasks of the Association will be deciding on the essential features of an enabling ballot initiative and working with legal advisors on the specific language of the initiative. There is no shortcut to this process, because boilerplate text for a ballot initiative that creates municipal subdivisions in the form of neighborhood popular assemblies with a legal role in the exercise of public powers (such as the limited use of eminent domain) does not exist.

The ongoing role of the Association will be to coordinate the unified actions of all the city's popular assemblies in response to a variety of shared issues and concerns.

Can this groundplan work?

Doubts about this groundplan may not be about its feasibility but its necessity. If the need is *not* regarded as acute by large numbers of people, the question will quickly become: *why* should we do it? On the other hand, if we agree that there is an acute need, the question will then become: *why* should we do *this*? Because we have already answered the *why* and *what* questions in previous articles, we have focused here on the *how*.

Drilling down on *how* to do it invariably raises questions about competence. In other words, does this groundplan propose more than we think is possible? Did the groundplan bite off more than it could chew? We don't think so. We have been privileged to know and learn from several outstanding organizers. Far from that rarefied breed, we regard ourselves as competent,

perhaps above average in professional organizing education, knowledge, skill, and experience. Since in the course of our professional work, we have done the equivalent of virtually every element of this groundplan, we believe that other reasonably well educated and trained public powers organizers, well supervised, will be able to do what is proposed here.

Having said all that, from our point of view the stumbling block of this groundplan is that it makes the organizing appear to require little more than a series of simple, straightforward steps. In this regard, Moshe was reminded of a conversation he had with Warren Haggstrom (1925-1986) many years ago, when Moshe was just beginning to learn about community organizing. He had entered Warren's grassroots community organizing program at UCLA with some practical work experience, but he naively imagined that the social change process was akin to playing with Lincoln Logs. One simply learned the logical steps required to construct and reconstruct organizations, communities, and institutions, reforming their policies and practices—kind of like a child building little log cabins.

But Warren described a very different kind of experience. He said that community organizing is more like taking an assignment to conduct an orchestra in the "Twilight Zone." When you arrive at the concert hall, the orchestra is already playing, the composition is unfamiliar, and there seem to be no musical scores. Suddenly, the conductor steps down, takes you by the arm, leads you to the podium, hands you the baton, and leaves. You carry on as best you can—sometimes leading, sometimes following. Sometimes you attend to a soloist, and sometimes to a whole section of players. Often, you're not clear about the direction. And all the while you watch players come and go, as they please—until finally, exhausted, you hand the baton to your replacement and leave the hall, the orchestra still playing as you walk away.

We have attempted in this groundplan to give prospective leader-organizers of public powers for the people a "score" at least, so they will be less likely to find themselves in a twilight zone where the players and parts are unrecognizable, unpredictable, and unmanageable, and the outcomes unsuitable to their goal of democratizing the governance of their city and furthering the movement to remake American democracy.

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