

TACTICS ARE ALL ABOUT CONTEXT



part of a series on social justice organizing by
Ricardo Levins Morales
watch in video format at RLMArtStudio.com

There's a well known saying that goes something like, "the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result." Actually, that's a definition of persistence. And in movements, the important thing is not the tactic and whether it's being persistent or repetitive, but what our understanding of the context is.

Persistence works in a couple of ways. For example, there's the persistence of waves beating against a cliff. That persistence eventually will wear away the cliff and cause its collapse. The very persistence is changing the conditions.

Another form of persistence is going back again and again to knock on a door that never opens. Your going back and knocking does not make somebody appear inside that office. However, it will increase the chances of finding them there if they're sometimes there and they're sometimes not. So it's really a question of context.



Another example would be, if you want to reach the moon by jumping—jumping and jumping and jumping—no matter how long you jump, you're not going to reach it. So persistence in that case might actually be ridiculous, but it's about the questions we ask ourselves.

For example: does change happen incrementally, or does it happen suddenly in large ruptures?

Well, it depends. If you plant enough trees, single tree after single tree, eventually something will click and you'll have a forest ecosystem. But no matter how many solar panels you install on the Titanic, it won't change the direction of the ship.

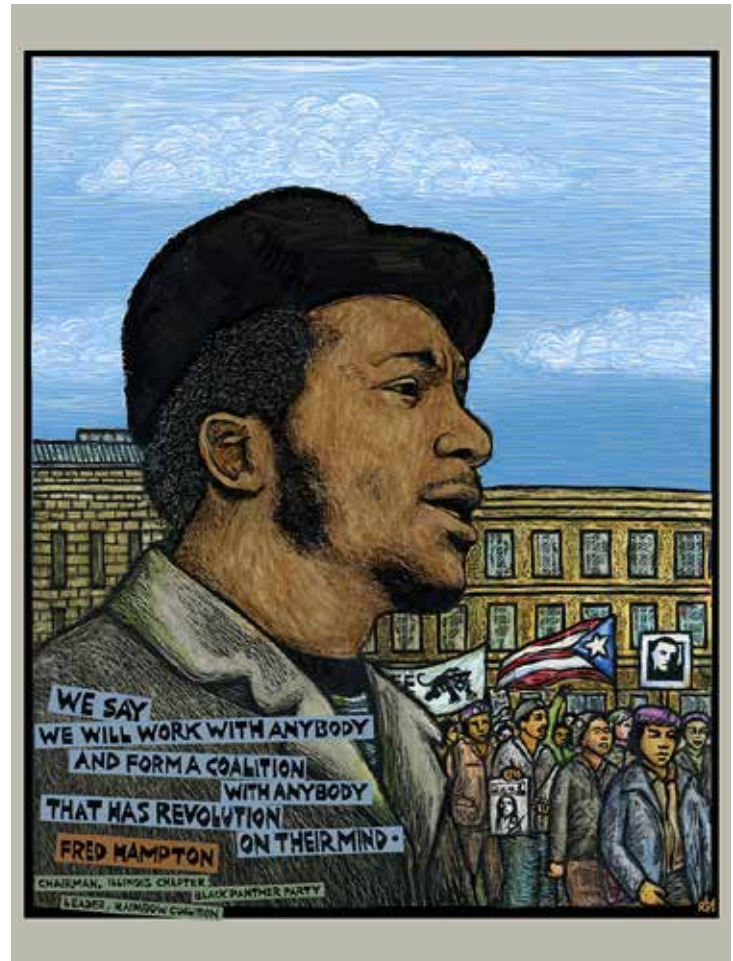


Similarly, is a system you're confronting crooked, or is it broken?

If the immigration system is broken, then you bring everybody who has an interest in it together and try to figure out a solution. If it's crooked, then you do not bring the crooks into the room with you. You work with your allies to come up with a solution.

What I'm saying is that often we find ourselves asking the wrong questions. "What are these principles of struggle? Which one works and which one doesn't work?"

It's actually not the tactics so much that matter, but the questions that we ask ourselves.



Ricardo Levins Morales is an artist and organizer based in Minneapolis. He uses his art as a form of political medicine to support individual and collective healing from the injuries and ongoing reality of oppression.



Ricardo was born into the anti-colonial movement in his native Puerto Rico and was drawn into activism in Chicago when his family moved there in 1967, including support work for the Black Panthers and Young Lords and later participating in or acting in solidarity with farmers, environmental, labor, racial justice, antiwar and other struggles for peoples empowerment. In addition to his art, he also leads workshops on creative organizing, social justice strategy and sustainable activism, and mentors and supports organizers.



RLM Art Studio is a union shop that produces and sells artwork Ricardo has made over the years as posters, cards, buttons, shirts and more. We also produce custom button pins at bulk prices for campaigns and causes. Browse and order online at RLMArtStudio.com.