

**“Toward a Living Revolution:
A Five-Stage Framework for Creating Radical Social Change”
by George Lakey (2016)**

“A Marvelous Manual for Political Revolutionaries”

What makes [this book](#) so great is not just its clear explanation of strategic thinking for activists but also its many examples taken from historical revolutionary endeavors. Much of the original 1973 edition is surprisingly timeless, though its rhetoric is definitely more “revolutionary” than is common today in the United States. Yet the escalating inequality since then, culminating in the disruptive election of 2016, suggests that both activist language and actions will be increasingly “revolutionary”.

Lakey’s five stages are infused with well-supported reasoning and examples of why non-violent revolution is likely to be far more successful than violence, especially in the long run. I find it interesting that the same reasoning often applies to military endeavors. For example, the recent violent regime changes in Iraq and later Libya provide good examples of short run success but long run failure, giving rise to ISIS on the one hand and to a failed state on the other. Meanwhile the violent response by ISIS has now led to a backlash in turn, providing yet another example.

Lakey’s first stage - “cultural preparation” – is often a long one. This involves analyzing the current situation in its historical context and developing an alternative vision for the future. As this begins to get credibility and traction, the second stage of the movement can proceed in earnest. This is the stage of “organizational development”, which, again, can be a lengthy process if the system is not yet ripe for change. Then the third stage of confrontation, or “propaganda of the deed”, can reach a much larger audience by direct actions that put a spotlight on inequities. However, these are often smaller actions initially, often to grow the space for another cycle of cultural preparation and organizational development with new allies on board.

Eventually the time is ripe for stage four – large scale “political and economic non-cooperation”, or acts of resistance. If successful, stage four results in regime change, but the revolution will not succeed if this just means replacing the old guard by a new guard, even if this is done electorally. There must be a new, more just and effective economic and political system. This is where stage five comes in. “Parallel or alternative institutions” are needed, or at least working models of them, to replace the old institutions. These new institutions, such as cooperatives, will be more successful if they have been under development during earlier stages.

A key take-away is that a study 323 attempts at regime change showed that non-violent means were successful 53% of the time while violence had only a 26% success rate. The non-violent revolutions that reduced inequities were the only ones to produce stable democracies.

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