

Protest and Resistance against America's Police State: What's Your Breaking Point to Take Action?

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When [Edward Snowden](#) reached his breaking point, the world saw the truth about the vast extent of spying by the NSA on Americans and people around the world. In an act of conscience, Snowden released secret information, saying "My sole motive is to inform the public as to that which is done in their name and that which is done against them."

Snowden sparked protest, lawsuits, criticism of the administration and US intelligence. His action shows the power that comes when someone inside the system break ranks and tells the truth. Successful movements depend on people breaking ranks: questioning, demurring, disobeying, defecting and withdrawing support. As [Ken Butigan writes in Waging Nonviolence](#), the impact can start a metamorphosis for all of us:

"the individual conscientious objector, the abstainer, and the resister — the one who, as Gandhi said, pits 'one's whole soul against the will of a tyrant.' Not only do the Edward Snowdens of the world help the rest of us see more clearly the realities we are up against — in this case, the institutionalization of unfettered, massive data collection on and profiling of the population — they can shock us into realizing that part of our job description as human beings is our obligation to withdraw our passive or active consent from such policies."

What is your breaking point?

This is the question we must all ask ourselves, especially those who have not yet taken action.

As whistleblower [Sibel Edmonds wrote this week](#), the inaction and apathy of people is our greatest enemy: "Apathy is a must ingredient for any police state, authoritarian regime, dictatorship, for abuses of power, for corruption, national atrocities, genocide. . . ."

This week, we read [the sad story of Brandon Bryant](#), the 27 year old who served as a drone operator from 2006 to 2011 at bases in Nevada, New Mexico and Iraq and who helped to kill 1,626 people. He now suffers from PTSD. Bryant told NBC News "I don't feel like I can really interact with that average, everyday person. I get too frustrated, because A, they don't realize what's going on over there. And B, they don't care."

Imagine how better off he would be if he had taken action years ago and told the truth about drone killings then. We hope he will continue to speak out about his experience. He will find that many people do care and may inspire other drone killers to stop what they are doing and help spur an end to US militarism.

One or a few people can make a tremendous difference. Sam Smith, the editor of Progressive Review, [reminds us](#) of the unpredictable power of action, recalling: “there was the time in early 1960 when four black college students sat down at a white-only Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, NC. Within two weeks, there were sit-ins in 15 cities in five southern states and within two months they had spread to 54 cities in nine states. By April the leaders of these protests had come together, heard a moving sermon by Martin Luther King Jr. and formed the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Four students did something and America changed. Even they, however, couldn’t know what the result would be.”

Just as [we are seeing in Turkey](#), it is often the response to an act of conscience that betrays the regime, shows the regime for what it is, and in a reversal, all of the power of the state boomerangs against itself. [Prime Minister Erdogan issued threats](#) followed by extreme police violence, but the result has been more people joining the protests. Yesterday, [thousands of lawyers joined](#) the protests and Erdogan issued another threat. And when Erdogan called for parents of children who are protesters to take them home, their mothers formed a [human barricade](#) to protect them from the police instead.

Another result has been [people joining protests](#) around the world and asking [what can I do for Turkey?](#) In the [United States](#), people [crowd sourced the funds for a full-page ad](#) in the New York Times. Photo journalist [Jenna Pope tells Acronym TV](#) Turkey is part of a global revolution, “Everything is connected,” Pope says, “people all over the world are fighting against these governments who are only interested in making the very rich even richer.”

We are seeing the same type of solidarity with whistle blowers. Up to a thousand people are expected to [protest in support of Snowden in Hong Kong](#) this Saturday, showing that he [may have been right in picking Hong Kong](#). Protests in [support of Snowden](#) and against the NSA’s [Internet spying](#) and [collection of phone records](#) are [also being held](#) in the [United States](#). Scores of civil liberties groups, Internet companies and others (including [Popular Resistance](#)) are [demanding an end to NSA spying](#). Sign up at [StopWatchingUs.org](#) to get involved.

The [ACLU has filed suit](#) against the program. But we need to rely more on our own actions than the [security-state friendly courts](#) to stop this [attack on democracy](#). And, Snowden also exposed, once again, how the [New York Times](#) and other corporate media report from the perspective of the security state.

Another high profile whistle blower, Bradley Manning, is also [garnering support from many people](#). His court martial, which [Chris Hedges describes as a ‘judicial lynching,’](#) began with the perfect symbolism: supporters of Manning wearing a shirt that said “Truth” had to hide that dangerous word on the first day of his trial. They were ordered to turn their shirts inside out.

Though the corporate media continues its inadequate reporting, there is lots [of citizen’s media writing](#) about the case and you can keep up with details at [www.BradleyManning.org](#). Many of Bradley’s supporters are [veterans who explain their support](#) for exposing the war crimes of US Empire.

Veterans are also among those leading the protests against the Guantanamo Bay prison camp. [Three veterans are on a solidarity hunger strike](#) in [support of Guantanamo prisoners being held in indefinite detention](#) without trial. We are impressed with many Americans who

put their lives on the line to [challenge militarism, especially nuclear weapons](#), and those are seeing through [the sham of 'humanitarian war'](#) in which military attacks kill innocent people and destroy countries.

This week, we continue to report on the [escalation actions of front-line environmentalists](#) who are challenging the extraction economy. The clarity of thought of those on the front lines, compared to the big environmental groups, was evident recently in Illinois. While some applauded the regulation of hydro-fracking, [others who are more clear in their thinking said, we need to ban hydro-fracking](#) because it cannot be done safely.

The solidarity of "[Fearless Summer](#)" with its epic protests against radical energy extraction is taking shape and promises to help [end the silence on dirty energy](#). Activists continue to protest at Obama fundraisers. We've reported on actions in New York and San Francisco, and now [in Los Angeles climate change protesters and immigrants](#) who called for an end to deportation protested Obama.

The reaction of the extraction industry shows their fear of organized militant resistance. TransCanada, the corporation seeking to profit from the tar sands pipeline, is telling the police that [protesters should be treated as terrorists](#). They are [calling Nebraska ranchers aggressive and abusive](#). And, protest also helps people take actions of conscience, [a TransCanada whistle blower has come forward](#) to report on the shoddy pipeline practices describing the company as "organized crime" that is "a "culture of noncompliance" and "coercion," with "deeply entrenched business practices that ignored legally required regulations and codes" and carries "significant public safety risks."

Another big area of continuing and escalating activism is around labor. The week began with [the Walmart shareholders meeting](#) where a Bangladesh activist addressed shareholders about unsafe working conditions and Janet Sparks, a Louisiana worker, pointed out "our CEO Mike Duke made over \$20 million last year more than one thousand times the average Walmart associate, with all due respect, I have to say, I don't think that's right." Then she quoted Walmart founder Sam Walton: "Listen to the Associates!" Activists say [the campaign is working](#) - building consciousness among workers and consumers; and affecting sales at Walmart which have been stagnant. The number two retailer, [Costco is seeing rising sales and rising stock](#) values while [paying employees good wages](#). On the contrary, [Walmart workers need government services](#) to get by.

Labor struggles are not only at Walmart. [Target contract janitors announced they would be going on strike](#) in Minneapolis. [Photographers at the Chicago Sun-Times are picketing](#) the newspaper after it laid them off. [Labor leaders are calling for a boycott of Labatt beer](#) as scabs have been working in place of workers on strike since April at the St. John's brewery. [General Motors workers in Colombia](#) have been striking due to unfair working conditions. They literally sewed their mouths closed in hunger strikes and occupied in front of the US embassy as well as bringing their concerns to the Detroit shareholders meeting. More than ever, it is an imperative to [rebuild an aggressive labor movement that is independent](#) of the Democrats and stands for working people. In Europe [labor unions are rallying on Juneteenth against austerity](#) and for tax justice.

Like many cities, Baltimore has a problem with abandoned homes. In Baltimore, MD there are 40,000 of them. An activist group, [Slum Lord Watch, is using an interesting tactic, artwork](#). They teamed up with an artist, Nether, to beautify the buildings and call out the owners in what they are calling the Wall Hunters: the Slumlord Project. They have 15

murals so far and each includes a QR Code which links people to information about the owner of the vacant building.

Another protest people may want to emulate is the [Carnival Against Capitalism](#). This event began with the WTO protests in 1999, and is being used this year in the run-up to the G8 meeting in London. Activists worked in several sections of the city including taking over an abandoned police station.

More and more people are becoming active. What holds others back? Perhaps their breaking point has not been reached or they do not have the time or resources to understand what is going on. One of our jobs in building a mass movement is to educate people in several areas. We can [start by listening](#) and bringing facts to explain their feelings about how bad our situation has become.

Right now an issue that is driving some people is their concern about the security state. Conor Friedersdorf's article explains that Presidents Bush and Obama have [put in place all the infrastructure that a tyrant would need](#). The author says that his article "is an attempt to grab America by the shoulders, give it a good shake, and say: Yes, it could happen here."

It also helps to show people that protest and campaigns of resistance work. There are so many examples throughout history. [Harvey Wasserman provides a recent example, showing how the anti-nuclear movement](#) worked to stop nuclear power plants and how the recent closure of San Onofre is part of an ongoing movement in the United States and around the world. And Bill Moyer wrote about the [eight stages](#) of a successful social movement.

Finally, we have to show people that we have a strategy that can win. There are now [100 years of history of civil resistance](#), so we know what is more likely to work and what is less likely. This week we [wrote an article laying out this history and describing a strategy to create a mass movement that can succeed](#), including what groups in the power structure we need to divide and pull to the movement to build our strength and weaken the status quo.

Carl Gibson, founder of US Uncut, [recently spoke](#) to Dennis Trainor, Jr. about the uprising in Iceland as a model for a mass movement in the US. Many of the ingredients are in place in the US such as growing wealth inequality and a government corrupted by big finance. Though it seems we are up against a powerful opponent, we have the information and tools we need to create the society in which we want to live.

Sam Smith reminds us that "The key to both a better future and our own continuous faith in one is the constant, conscious exercise of choice even in the face of absurdity, uncertainty and daunting odds." He tells us that change starts with action, that each of us has a way to contribute, and that when "we will have thrown every inch and ounce of our being into what we are meant to be doing which is to decide what we are meant to be doing. And then to walk cheerfully over the face of the earth doing it."

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