

Ian's Blog From Jail #3 "Reflections on Civil Disobedience" -

One night, later in the week at Porcfest this year I was walking around and stopped at a campfire. A couple of the faces I recognized as people I had met earlier in the week - the rest I did not know. I believe 100% of them were attending their first Porcfest.

Apparently, I was right on cue, as when I approached the fire, some comment was made about how if Ian Freeman were around, they could ask me. The individual looked up, saw that the universe had delivered me to their campfire, exclaimed a pleasant surprise and proceeded to ask: "Why Keene?" Just prior to my arrival they had been discussing this, perhaps curious as to why I had not chosen to move to Manchester and also under the misconception that it was I who started the move to Keene. It's an understandable misconception, especially to people who may not have paid attention to the Free State Project prior to the last year or two.

Allow me to explain - somewhat as I did at the campfire - while I may be an effective promoter of Keene as a destination for liberty activists, like many of the ideas I promote, it wasn't originally mine. I am certainly

an early mover to Keene, but I wasn't the earliest. There are many reasons for you to consider a move to Keene (see over 130 at MoveToFreeKeene.com), but the main reason I moved was because I was inspired by ~~the~~ the earliest movers: people like Russell and Kat Kanning, Dave Ridley, ~~and~~ Lauren Canario and her husband Jim Johnson. It was outstanding to me that the Kannings were publishing and distributing their own newspaper, but what really got me excited was their courageous civil disobedience.

Had no Civ Dis been happening, who knows when I would have made-the-move, or where in NH I'd have ended up. I knew I wanted to help this happy band of noncooperative, creative liberty-lovers and also add my radio show to the liberty media in Keene and send a beacon to like-minded people around the world that Keene was where exciting things were already happening. Things far more interesting than the typical political campaigning I was used to in Florida.

When I arrived, I grabbed a video camera and jumped right in -not quite ready to disobey - I saw my role as adding to the media covering the heroic acts of the Kannings and Lauren C. I knew eventually I would - hanging around brave people tends to encourage and embolden.

As I was telling the stories of early

Keene EV Dis, like the time Kat and Lauren were arrested by the feds for holding signs peacefully and quietly in the IRS office, it became clear to me that the young protesters at the campfire had no idea who the Kennings and Lauren Canario were. They had never seen the videos of their arrests that had so inspired me and were unaware that anything had come before FreeKeene.com. 

I finished up telling the tale of how I had been inspired to move to Keene and bid the campfire good night as I moved on, walking to other campsites. As I ~~walked~~ set off down the road, a realization struck me:

The origins of Keene as an activist destination, specifically the heroic activists that made it so had become a campfire story. It had only been five or six years since their inspiring civil disobedience that I consider legendary, but these new activists were totally unaware of.

I have mixed feelings about this phenomenon. On one hand, it's great that Keene is seen as a destination because of the activism that is happening now, but on the other it is sad that the amazing work that was pre-FreeKeene (we launched at the end of 2006) has been lost to the sands of time. It would be nice to track down those old videos and re-release them as a retrospective

so all the new blood in this movement can see and be inspired by what has come before.

Since this post is about my thoughts on Civil Disobedience, I thought it was important to start by acknowledging and appreciating the "first wave"- the great activists who moved here first, started from zero, and inspired the second wave. I would arbitrarily say the first wave ran from 2004-2006 and the second from 2007-2010, which was fully covered here at FK- you need only click back through the archives ~~to~~ to experience (or revisit) events like OTN's Sam Dodson and Dave Ridley of RidleyReport.com being arrested for recording video in the court lobby, the outlaw gardener, the couch enforcer, trespassive twelve, disobedient seven, the historic 420 celebrations- including the KPD Smokeout and Pumpkinfest arrests, and more that are escaping my mind at the moment.

~~So here I sit~~

So here I sit at the Cheshire "House of Corrections" a.k.a. the Keene Spiritual Retreat, with plenty of time to ponder and reflect. The big question being asked of me is, "Was it worth it?". I'll get to that, but first, as one who has observed, participated in, and reported on many instances of Civil Disobedience and noncooperation, I think it's important to address the most common critique, which amounts to:

"What good has come from all of this disobedience? What have you accomplished or changed ~~besides~~ besides

making people angry?"

Those making this accusatory critique appear to only have one criteria by which they judge the success of civil disobedience - whether or not a statute or ordinance was changed as a result of the disobedience. From their perspective, they are right. To my knowledge, after six years of various civil disobedience and noncooperation, no statutes or ordinances have been changed. Hundreds of days and nights have been cumulatively spent in jail (I am in on a 90-day sentence - one of the longest thus far meted out to an NH liberty activist.) and indeed, many observers have been angered. Juries have thus far refused to completely nullify cases involving CivDis or noncooperation, handing out guilty verdicts in 100% of the four cases thus far. (All the jury cases have happened thus far in 2011 and to their credit they did find Bob "Weedn Claus" Constantine ~~guilty~~ of a misdemeanor cannabis possession charge rather than the felony cultivating with which he'd been charged originally and they also found me not guilty of resisting arrest but neither seems to be an instance of jury nullification.) I'm arbitrarily leaving out Pete and Ademo's historic nullification in their felony wiretapping case, as that took place in the geopoltical designation known as Massachusetts.

Critics submit that ~~these court cultures~~, plus angry anonymous comments posted on various internet news sites, in

and the lack of legislative change
addition to real-life conversations^V, is proof that Civil Disobedience has failed to win the hearts and minds of people in NH. Of course, it should be obvious that the critics are ignoring that there are indeed NH natives and longtime inhabitants who support these tactics - some of them are actually participating in them! So, it's clear not everyone is upset about civil disobedience, but for the ~~critics~~ sake, let's give them the claim that most people in NH are opposed to disobedience. (Clearly some disobedience is going to be more popular than others, depending on the issue and how the activists approach it.)

of argument

One thing you can count on politicians to do is what they consider practical and take the path-most-traveled, meaning any "legal" action they perceive as low-risk. It is much more comforting to do the time-honored thing and beg master to change his rules or attempt to be elected as master than it is to actually do what is moral - what is right - and stand up for their beliefs. I mean who in their right mind would want to anger their fellow slaves? People in the past ~~had~~ who disobeyed were crucified like that Jesus guy - why on earth would anyone want to actually emulate him? It's much easier to go to church and call yourself a Christian, isn't it? Muhammad was also persecuted for years and came to physical harm because he refused to ~~ever~~ obey the masters of his time - fortunately he did not die at their hands. More recently, disobedients have faced water cannons, police beatings, and angry crowds. Thus far in the chronicles of NH

liberty activism we have only faced cagings. Our masters have become more careful with how they handle disobedience, likely thanks to the proliferation ~~of~~ of video devices and the ease of distribution. The masters are very concerned about their aura of legitimacy - so they've had to soften up a bit on the enforcement side. The point being - disobedience is less-risky than ever, but most people are petrified of it. That it angers some people is a convenient excuse. So what if 5% or 75% are upset by you doing what is right? Did Jesus, Muhammad, Ghandi, or Rosa Parks conduct a public opinion poll prior to making a stand? Were their actions mistakes because people were upset by them? Would their movements have been more successful had they merely begged master to change the "rules"?

So if legislation hasn't changed, what has been accomplished by all this disobedience? What good has it done?

> Personal Empowerment - Anyone who has the courage to disobey, or say "no" and noncooperate with ~~the~~ master's demands, whether all alone or in a group of disobedients will be better off mentally for it. You are acting on your conscience, casting aside fear and letting the light in your soul shine. I assure you - it's very satisfying compared to begging master for some scraps of freedom. As Ghandi said, you are being the change you wish to see. It matters not when the change

(Mic, please spell check me - I feel like I am getting Gandhi wrong... Gandhi?)
~~~~~

manifests externally - you've changed for good, on the inside. If nothing else came from disobedience, this alone would make it "worth it".

> Encouraging Others - As the "first wave" of NH liberty & disobedients was encouraged by the examples of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Rosa Parks, many of the "second wave" were inspired by the first. The next wave will be inspired by the second, and so on. When one observes others saying "no", it becomes more possible in one's mind. "If someone can do it..."

> Attracting ~~others~~<sup>like-minded souls</sup> - While the politicos busy themselves with currying favor with the ruling class and engaging in elections, ~~some~~ some have been frustrated by the lack of publicity their efforts receive. To be fair, I have always been happy to report their successes (and to their credit they are making some headway in NH) on my radio show and here at FreeKeene. I get it that disobeying is scary and risky - it will never be for everyone, so I want to help the inside-the-system folks recruit new movers, because it will take activism of all stripes to achieve liberty in our lifetime. That said, disobedience has sizzle and politics tends to be very dull. Promoting disobedient and noncooperative acts will attract those who already have the courage to disobey as well as those who are looking to find the courage and just need to feel like someone's got their back. Keene is the Mecca of liberty-oriented disobedience. ~~and revolution~~

~~Silencing the Heretics~~. This is Harry Browne's "silver rule" in action - be true to yourself and you will attract to you others of like mind.

I want to attract liberty-lovers who have courage and are willing to take a risk, if only a little.

A lot of people taking little risks will be unstoppable. This is a numbers game. The more activists we have here of all stripes, the better. If some NH natives get upset, that's to be expected. As our numbers increase, it becomes more likely that a liberty-lover will become their customer, co-worker, employee, employer, or neighbor. Then it will be much harder for them to be angry and misinformed.

Remember - anyone who challenges the status quo will be the target of vitrol, as the ~~big~~ politicos are now discovering with the huge angry backlash (Newspaper articles, editorials, protests) excoriating them for cutting the state budget by 12%. But I digress.

> Free Publicity - Civil Disobedience frequently results in lots of press coverage in print, on tv, radio, and online. We've had coverage by the AP, Slate, Cannabis Culture, newspapers statewide, the Boston Phoenix, Globe, Counterpunch, and more. This coverage, whether positive, neutral, or negative is worth thousands of dollars and contributes to attracting more liberty lovers to NH and to Keene.

- > Sparks Discussion & Potential for Political Change - The open container Civ Dis in Keene led to Heikka Courser bringing the issue in front of the city council. It was assigned to a committee and the public commented all in favor of its repeal. Of course the opponents were the police, and the committee voted to "table" the issue, which means do nothing. Also, the 420 celebrations have expanded to the State House, the police have done nothing, and the celebrants have become bolder, this year chalkking messages all over the front sidewalk, steps, and columns, walking en masse through the state house, and even singing ~~liberty~~ freedom songs in the lobby. ~~The~~  
~~State legislator has yet to stand the political courage~~  
~~to propose any action~~ Will the legislators notice the hundreds of protestors on their doorsteps and move forward with decriminalization? Only time will tell. Meantime, the issue is alive and well, and you can bet action like that gets people talking.
- > Bad Laws Become Unenforceable - Sure, when it's a lone disobeident or only a handful, it's easy ~~to~~ for the police to crack down on activists. However, this is a numbers game. Once the number of disobeidents outnumber the enforcers, the game changes. The police blink. The activists win. If a bad statute or ordinance is not being enforced, that's almost as good as it being repealed. A perfect example of this is the epic 420 celebrations in Keene

back in 2009. The smoke-outs built within days to over 100 attendees in Keene's Central Square and KPD decided to crackdown by doing the only thing they know how to do - target the perceived leaders for arrest. NH Liberty activist Rich Paul was arrested and carted off to the police station. The aggressors never could have expected what happened next - about half of the crowd walked to the police department, crossed the "no unauthorized access" line, sat in a circle, and smoked up right outside the back door. Rich was released on personal recognition to a cheering crowd who then returned to the square. KPD ~~was~~ was not done, however. The following day (these 420s were daily), they again invaded the crowd and again made an arrest (or two) still hoping to intimidate everyone into stopping their "illegal" behavior. Instead, the crowd again walked to KPD, this time entering the lobby and smoking cannabis there! That was the last time KPD ever bothered 420 in Central Square, essentially making it a DMZ for cannabis smoking. The key ingredients for this historic civil disobedience win were large numbers, solidarity, and perseverance.

That brings us to the areas that can be improved in the CIVIL'S realm. The Liberty movement has never seen any notable civil disobedience or noncooperation until the advent of the

Free State Project. Though we've been at it six years, the movement is still novice in many ways, despite the fact it has spawned CIVDs in other places like Washington D.C. ~~with the~~, Orlando, and Austin. Here are some areas that could use improving:

> Numbers! - This is the most critical aspect that will affect all of the other weak areas that I will point out. There have been so many instances where more disobedients would have turned the tide and likely prevented many arrests. The "Trespassive Twelve" were arrested for walking around the ~~new~~ new jail (where I am now), even though ~~we~~ we had done so many times at the old jail. However, ~~ten~~ ten minutes before the police arrived there were 50 people ~~gathered~~ gathered in front of the jail. Most left when an activist with a police scanner announced the cops were en route. Considering the police had to round up every officer in the vicinity (including Keene, Marlboro, and Swanzey cops, plus a state cop, and jail guards) to ~~arrest~~ arrest a dozen of us (there were 13 officers total to our 12), how would they have behaved if all 50 activists had stayed? Another example where we saw how numbers changed the game, so no speculation is necessary, was last year's Keene city council drinking game. Activists were arrested for "disorderly conduct" when they (including me and I still have trial coming on this) refused to allow the police to search their bottles and then

refused to leave the ostensibly public meeting. The "mayor" interrupted his own meeting to target the handful of activists, but at ~~the next~~ meeting, ~~no~~ over a dozen activists showed up and played the drinking game. Not a peep from "the mayor", no attempts to search, no orders to leave. Numbers are critical. It's been tricky to get numbers built up because activists will get arrested in smaller groups then get convicted and have "suspended sentences" put over their heads, basically taking them out of the game.

➤ Persistence & Sustainability - Because we don't have a large pool of disobedients (the 420s were an exception because most participants were locals who were just along for the ride - many would attempt to conceal their smoking when cops arrived. They weren't really doing open disobedience, but their presence was a big help nonetheless.), we can't keep up the disobedience like Food Not Bombs did recently with their feeding of the homeless in an Orlando park this summer. Week after week, new faces showed up to be arrested. Eventually OPD dropped the charges. In Keene, when OTN's Sam was arrested for recording video in the district court lobby, Dave Ridley did a follow-up challenge and was arrested. There was idle talk of a mass videoing, but no one stepped forward to lead it. We lost that one.

> Organization and ~~Leadership~~ Planning - One of the big pluses to the NH Liberty movement is that it is decentralized. No one is in charge. That is good in many aspects. One need not ask some dear leader or board for permission to do something and there is no head for the aggressors to cut off and cripple the movement. ~~The downside~~, The downside is that organizing liberty activists can be like "herding cats" - everyone tends to be independent. That's not to say it can't be done. If someone has a good idea, people will jump on board and get involved and be open to suggestion / direction / delegation. However, for that to happen requires...

> Leadership & Instigators - This is a new movement, and the reality is that many F.S.P. movers have never really done activism before. They are excited and willing to do, but feel more comfortable joining rather than leading, at least for now. Hopefully the students will eventually become the masters. However, like in the rest of life, the 80/20 rule is in effect in the NH Liberty movement. 20% instigate and lead most activism and the 80% help out. We need more instigators and leaders. Again more numbers can solve all of these problems. At the time of this writing, there are only about 1,000 "Free Staters" here in NH.

So, I've covered the history, the benefits, and

even leveled some critique at the civil disobedience / noncooperation movement here in NA. At this point, I have been working on this essay and third blog post from jail over multiple days and am now on my fifteenth handwritten page! I still have to answer the question, "Was it worth it?"; but first big thanks to Mike Barskey at Mailtojail.com for providing such an awesome service helping people connect with jailed liberty-loving activists. He is the one taking the time to print and mail 90% of the mail I get in here AND he is transcribing these blog posts to FreeKeene. If you haven't yet, please visit MailtoJail.com and send him a contribution. Stamps aren't cheap, and his time is valuable, not to mention the service!

Now, on to the big question: "Was it worth it?" (END of Post 3)

"I will answer that in my next post. Stay tuned."