



## **Transformation of Politics – building a bridge between the public & the Republic**

“Never let a serious crisis to go to waste”<sup>1</sup>

**Background:** How the Movement was created and its role in transformational politics through experimental politics.

When Iceland collapsed from the top of the UN’s most developed nation index in a free fall to the bottom in 2008, people, a state of shock, slowly realized that everything they had put their trust and faith towards had failed them. The Media, the Academics, the Government, the Parliament, the Bureaucratic body, the Judicial, everything failed. As a result of this realization various grass-roots movements popped up everywhere and quite early on attempts to bring those groups together to work on joint projects were quite successful. As a result of a fact finding mission to find out what all of these groups felt as the single most important things to do in order to get permanent change in our system to prevent such disasters from occurring again, it was clear all of them wanted to get within the system through the parliament to apply pressure both from inside and outside for more rapid change to occur and to make sure that the voice of the citizens would be represented at the highest places of power.

Solidarity –coalition of the grass-roots movements was formed in February 2009, two days later it merged with yet another cluster of like-minded groups into the Civic Movement, which was created 8 weeks before the general elections on April 26<sup>th</sup> 2009. The Civic Movement got 7.2% of the vote, despite the fact it had minimal funding, which showed us that our message was getting through to the public.

Hammering out the agenda for the Movement was a painstaking process but had to be done. The different groups reached an agreement that we would not define ourselves as right or left or center so there were no ideological ties to any other party. Instead, we would define ourselves based on our agenda. We went through many challenges of format and in the end we had a consensus that the movement would be structured as horizontal rather than pyramid with leaders at the top. We saw ourselves as a hit and run movement that should not remain in parliament for longer than 8 years (2 terms) and that our agenda would resemble a checklist. Once we could complete our checklist we would dissolve the movement. We are influenced by the call for radical change in Iceland based on democratic reform and accountability. By democratic reform we mean:

1. National referendum; that 7% or more of the nation should be able to call for a national referendum by legal means. Same applied to a call for a new government.
2. Vote for the person, not the party. We can vote for individuals across the political spectrum we trust rather than just one party every 4 years.
3. One person, one vote; currently the vote from individuals living in 3 smaller constituencies have more weight than the votes by city dwellers in the larger constituencies.
4. Sever the ties between corporations and political parties; make all donations transparent and place a cap on the amount donated.
5. Transparency and establish a high standards of ethics a standard in all government bureaucracies and corporate entities.

**The Movement in praxis:** the annoying mosquito in the tent.

The Movement practices experimental politics. Here is a list a few elements of experimentation.

1. None of us serving as MP's of the Movement aspire to keep this job or get a favor job because of this job. This is our commitment to the people and the Movement and this has given us more freedom than possible to describe. Because of strict rules we set before elections that no one could run for us that has served as an MP – we have been free to mark our own path and brake codes of traditions since we don't know what the hidden rules are anyway.
2. We don't consider ourselves to be a part of minority nor majority in relation to what we support or who we choose to work with in relation to parliamentary work. We support anyone that is doing something inside parliament that would support our agenda and help advance it. Part of that experiment was to form a coalition with the majority when mapping out what committees each party-movement in parliament would get. We won seats in committees we felt were relevant to our agenda and the majority got more seats in committees by this method. Since we are few this was the best way of targeting how we would best serve.
3. We don't have a leadership based movement, and thus rotate the responsibilities of internal parliamentary leadership such as party group chairperson, on a yearly basis. If requested to write articles or appear in the media in leadership based roles we also rotate based on simple methods such as who knows the most about the issue or by drawing a straw.
4. We encourage more collaboration between MP's cross party and that the parliament reclaims the power once associated with the role of the lawmakers. Parliaments around the world have become weak and are at best a processing machine for the ministries and other government departments. The balance of power has shifted and it is high time for parliamentarians to aspire to something more than consolidation of even more power. We feel that one of the methods of creating a bridge between the people and the parliament is to explain to the general public how things work and where they have the right to have impact on the parliamentary process. In fact, without the will of the people nothing will change.

5. E-politics is something we encourage and we would like to see the parliamentary committees commitment to allow the public to have a platform to express what they feel needs to be improved placed under high priority. This could be done by creating shadow-committees online, where the MP's should consider it a part of fact finding to study these shadow-committees.
6. We invite individuals and organizations to use us as a bridge in order to get answers to questions they have not been successful in getting from the ministries.
7. We are not a party nor do we want to be a party. We have created a platform for various grassroots groups to join hands when needed in order to create pressure from outside. We will, if asked, raise the agenda from the inside.
8. We do not have a membership enrollment program. We encourage people to work with us for specific issues and to that end we offer to help form debate groups or pressure groups on a grassroots level. Because of this we have done experiments when asked to nominate people for committee work outside parliament, for example the ministries often ask for someone from each party-movement to work on specific issues. Instead of nominating friends and supporters we nominate people who we know are experts in this field without political ties. This is a part of severing the ties and the need to party politics.
9. We are not in the parliament to make friends, our role is to be the annoying mosquito in the tent and point out the issues no matter the difficulty or whose toes we step on. Our role is to be brutally honest also in relation to ourselves. We have made mistakes but we openly admit to them and have no issue when it comes to apologizing for human behavior such as making mistakes. To us the important element is not the fear of making mistakes but rather of not learning from them.
10. We jump into the deep end of the pool, not knowing if we will sink or swim. But jump we have to. We have been ignored, laughed at and smeared, one has to have a thick skin to deal with this job. But we think it is high time to change the system so that it actually works for the people it is supposed to serve. In order for system change one has to have real pressure from inside and outside the system.
11. Perhaps our greatest victory for democracy was to get through the parliament a proposal giving the government the task of leading Iceland forward, in a new change of direction, to make the country into a safe haven for freedom of speech and an economically viable country again. It has never happened in our young democracy that a parliamentarian bill or proposal of such nature has been passed. We believe we can encourage other MP's support our policies and we encourage them to follow suit.

1. This quote originally was from Obama's Ex- Chief of Staff, *Rahm Emanuel*. [http://sayanythingblog.com/entry/democrats\\_never\\_let\\_a\\_good\\_crisis\\_go\\_to\\_waste/](http://sayanythingblog.com/entry/democrats_never_let_a_good_crisis_go_to_waste/).

## COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

1. What is the agenda of the Movement? Do you have a written Mission Statement?
2. What are the other grass roots organizations? What is the thing that binds you all together?
3. What legislation are you committed to, and why?
4. “Hit and run” or “guerilla tactics?” – Choice is up to you.
5. What if it takes more than two terms to achieve your goals and objectives? What happens then?
6. Instead of talking about “experiments” consider talking about creating new political policies, sometimes people are afraid of “experiments”.
7. If this is done as a Press Release then it will need details of policy, political strategies, descriptions of grassroots organizations and what it is that binds these organizations together.
8. This should read as a “Party Manifesto
9. What is your stated aim as a Movement (Short Mission Statement)”