

## **Time Line of Consensus Use in the U.S.A**

**Compiled by Autumn Brown**

Beginning of Time – Stateless societies practice some form of consensus, due to lack of mechanism for coercion of those who are of the minority or majority opinion.

12<sup>th</sup> Century – The founding of the Iroquois Confederacy, or League of Six Nations, is popularly considered to have coincided with a total solar eclipse that took place in 1142. It was a union of five nations (which later became six), whose Great Council of Elders, or Sachems, made decisions by consensus. Each nation had its own Council of Elders, made up of the chiefs of each Tribe within the Nation, and each national council had the power to convene the Great Council, though the Great Council did not have the power to convene itself. It is said that equality between the sexes had a strong support in the Confederacy, and that women held real power, particularly the power to approve or veto declarations of war.

17<sup>th</sup> Century – The Quaker movement is founded in England. At 350 years and counting, the Quakers provide us with the longest documented use of consensus. As the Quakers participated in the colonization of the Americas, they were considered favored ambassadors by the League of Six Nations of the Iroquois, because of their similarity and familiarity in group process and decision-making.

19<sup>th</sup> Century – The Quakers become active in the abolitionist movement.

20<sup>th</sup> Century – *1950's-60's* – The Quakers become active in the civil rights and peace movements. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), founded by Ella Baker, operates by consensus at this time. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) chapters practice consensus, although the organization's constitution assumes majority vote.

*1970's* – As the feminist movement grows in size and scope, the informal consensus practiced by once small collectives produces a major organizational crisis, articulated in Jo Freeman's "Tyranny of Structurelessness." In response, some radical Quakers begin offering training in consensus process (one being George Lakey of the Movement for a New Society).

*Late 1970's-Early 1980's* – The Movement for a New Society (MNS) and others played major role in the organization of the Clamshell Alliance and the Abalone Alliance, the direct action components of the anti-nuclear movement. For the first time, formal consensus process, affinity groups, and spokes-councils are being used in concert for the purposes of political organizing in America.

21<sup>st</sup> Century – Since the anti-globalization movement took hold in the mid-late 90's of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, formal consensus process and "American-style" facilitation have been the model of choice for the direct action movement. The model has also been adopted in worker-owned and -run cooperative businesses, and some non profits. Some major corporations also operate by consensus (like the Harley-Davidson company), whereas others use what they call "consensus-building" to bring employees in line with company policy.